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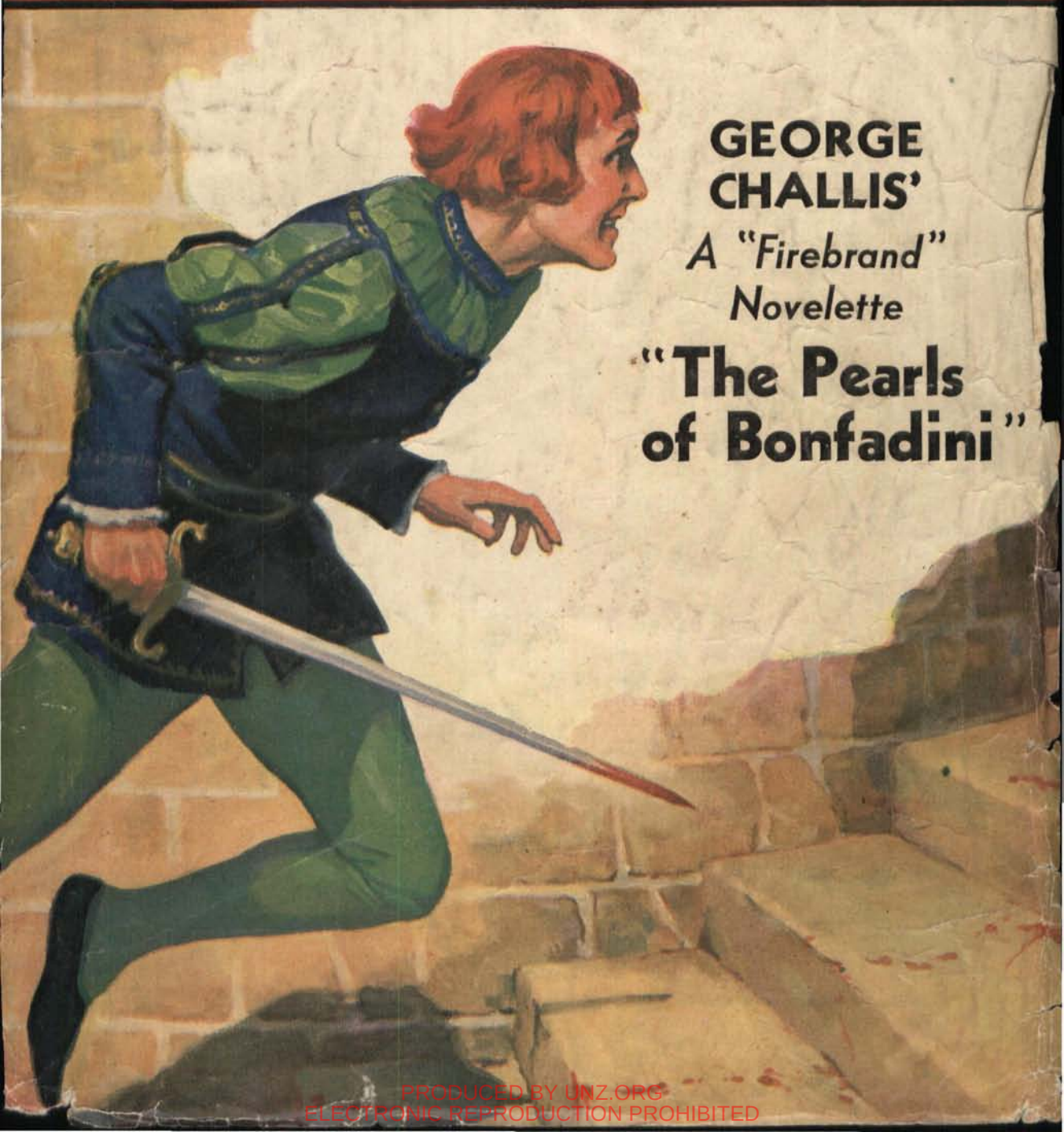
A Tall Timber Novel by **F. R. Pierce**

ARGOSY

AUG. 24 WEEKLY



GEORGE CHALLIS'

A "Firebrand" Novelette

"The Pearls of Bonfadini"

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The one thing they didn't teach him

THEY taught him everything about business except the thing he most needed to know—*how to avoid offending business men with whom he came in contact.*

Are they "not in" to you?

The No. 1 handicap in business is halitosis (bad breath). It hurts you with your associates, your employer, and the people you have to meet in the course of your work.

The insidious thing about halitosis is that you yourself never know when you have it—and anyone, yourself included, is likely to be a victim. Ninety per cent of cases, says a noted dental authority, are due to the fermentation of tiny food particles that even careful tooth brushing has failed to remove.

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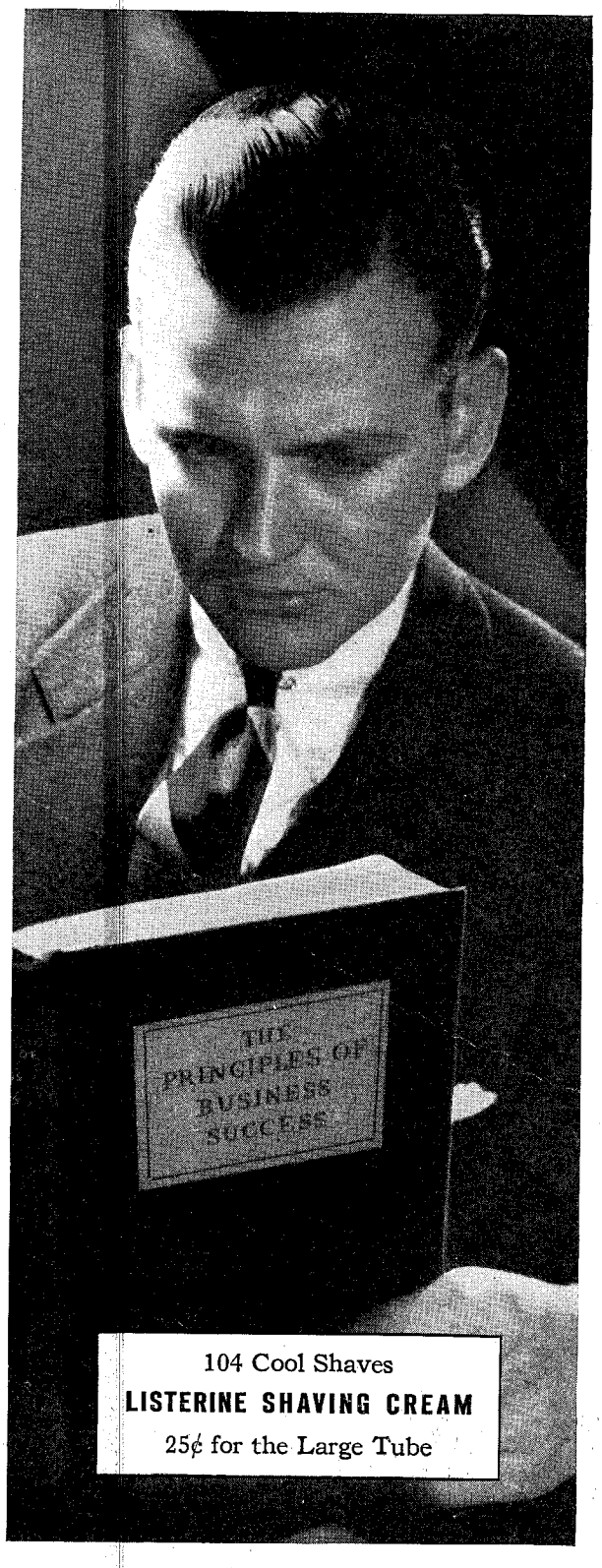
Get in the habit of rinsing the mouth with Listerine systematically, every morning and every night, and between times before appointments. Keep a bottle handy in home and office. Tuck it into your bag when you travel. It is a business and social asset. Lambert Pharmacal Company, St. Louis, Missouri.

LISTERINE *halts halitosis* (BAD BREATH)



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ARGOSY

Action Stories of Every Variety

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The Pearls of Bonfadini

By GEORGE CHALLIS

Author of "Claws of the Tigress," "The Cat and the Perfume," etc.

Cesare Borgia vowed to give Italy a final lesson in cruelty and intrigue—against which Tizzo was to match his avenging sword

CHAPTER I.

A STRANGE POISON.

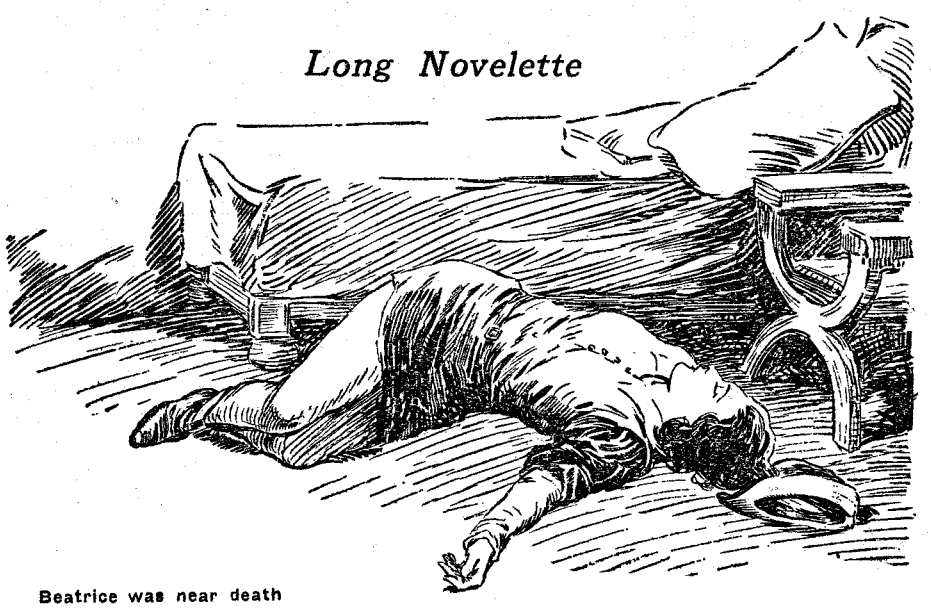
CESARE BORGIA, all in black, except for the white ruff of collar about his neck, black-masked also, across the upper part of his face, lolled in a big chair that had the dimensions and gave the effect of a throne. Always one who loved shadows, he had the room lighted by a few candles only and they cast on the wall wavering shadows of the men who stood near the chair of the duke of Romagna. Only Bonfadini's face could be seen clearly; it was so bone-white that it seemed to be illumined from within. The poisoner's expression was always one of still attention.

Before the duke stood Giovanni Malatesta, the waver and some of the sooty smoke of the candles in his face, a captain in the employ of Oliverotto, the hired soldier. He was completely in plate armor. His helmet was plumed. His raised visor exposed a stern young face, fearless of the great man whom he was to address.

The Borgia said: "We've had enough compliments, Malatesta. Now let's have the letter."

Malatesta bowed, unrolled a scroll

Long Novelette



Beatrice was near death

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of paper, and read aloud: "To the most noble Cesare Borgia, duke of Valentinois and the Romagna, we who are signed below send greetings, set forth certain complaints, and declare the action which we are about to take.

"Among our complaints the first is that no man's life is safe when he comes near the noble duke, whether he be an enemy or too great a friend.

"Second, the money which the noble duke promises for service is paid in full, always, but his other promises are neglected.

"Third, his ambition is so great that presently there would be room for only one man in Italy.

"For these reasons we have determined to serve him no longer but to stand together against him. For this purpose we sign our names:

"Giovanpaolo Baglione, Paolo Orsini, Fabio Orsini, Francesco Orsini, Oliverotto da Ferma, Vitellozzo Vitelli."

The duke did not lift his head; there was a slight rustling sound as his men turned towards him. The pale hand of Alessandro Bonfadini, secretary and poisoner, drooping over the top of

Tizzo's sword sank through flesh

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Borgia's chair, touched his shoulder as though by accident, but received no sign.

"You have another paper there in your hand," said the Borgia. "What is that?"

"It is for Captain Tizzo," said the messenger.

"Is it as pleasant as the other? Read it!" said the duke.

"Aloud?" asked Malatesta.

"Aloud, if that pleases Captain Tizzo, also," said the duke.

Tizzo of Melrose advanced a step and nodded, the candlelight glimmering on the red of his hair. Most of the men about him were not of middle age, and yet he seemed a youth among the youngest.

"Read it aloud, certainly," said Tizzo.

"Very well," said Malatesta. And unfurling the paper he read: "To the noble Captain Tizzo of Melrose:

"We send you greetings as to a brave and wise officer by whom almost alone the towns of Forli and Urbino were won over to the possession of the duke of Romagna.

"Tizzo, we know your honesty and your quality as a soldier and as a man. With you at his side, we fear the duke. Without you, we care less for him than for an apple-paring . . ."

THE hand of Bonfadini again touched the shoulder of the Borgia, and this time that shoulder shrugged slightly up and down. Bonfadini glided instantly towards the candles, stepping between them and the open window. He leaned as though to trim the wicks, and each one that he touched gave, instantly, a slightly brighter flame, a single puff of pale smoke, as was natural. And the smoke was blowing towards Malatesta.

The Malatesta was reading on: "We wish all men to know that we desire to have you among us, a wise, trusted, and well-rewarded commander. Leave him and we will make your career famous. Stay with him and you will be praised and paid until you are dangerously strong, and then you will be stabbed and thrown in a gutter, as he has thrown other men."

"This is rather strong talk," said the Borgia calmly. "But continue, Malatesta."

The captain hesitated, shrugged his shoulders, and then struggled with a yawn; which was strange, because it was hardly a time or a place to feel sleepy.

"We wish to point out to you," continued the captain, reading, "that although the duke holds the Lady Beatrice merely as a hostage for the good behavior of Giovanpaolo Baglione and promises that you shall have her hand in marriage as soon as—"

Captain Malatesta hesitated, yawned openly, rubbed his eyes, and fell suddenly to the ground.

There was a general exclamation. Several of the men rushed forward to the fallen captain. And one of them cried out: "Dead! Dead as a stone!"

The voice of the Borgia, usually muffled and low, now was heard saying loudly: "A proper reward for traitors, my friends! Let all of you bear witness that no hand of mine touched this man; the finger of God was laid on him for his treachery. May all that he spoke for die like dogs in the same way. Bear witness, all of you!"

He gave instant order that the body should be carried out; and all except two of those who were about the duke left his presence at once. They had noticed nothing strange in the air of

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the room, except perhaps a slight fragrance almost like that of violets; also, a few of them were just a trifle dizzy. But the open air soon put that right.

Cesare Borgia remained alone with Alessandro Bonfadini and bright-eyed, cat-faced Niccolò Machiavelli. The duke went to the couch and stretched himself upon it. He yawned—in his turn.

"That is very precious stuff, Bonfadini," he said. "How much of it remains to you?"

"About six men, my lord," said the poisoner.

Machiavelli laughed. "That is a new measurement," he said.

"Can you make more of it, Bonfadini?" asked the duke.

"I am making more, my lord," said the poisoner.

"When will it be ready?"

"In about two years," said Bonfadini.

"Ah hai! Two years to make a few pinches of fragrant white powder that burns so well in a candle flame?" asked the Borgia.

"My lord," said Bonfadini, "must understand that I am not often at the cattle farm; I usually must be at the side of my lord."

"Of course you must be at my side," said the Borgia. "You are the brightest dagger in my armory and you are kept shining by continual use. But what have your visits to the cattle farm to do with your poisons?"

"I am more at ease in the country air, my lord," said Bonfadini. "My mind works more precisely."

"Be frank," said the duke. "Come, come! Do you think I would question you before my wise friend Machiavelli except that he is free to hear everything I know? No, Bonfadini; you help me to some very considerable deeds, and he has the pen that may make them famous. What is all this about poisons and the cattle farm, and two years to make half an ounce of white powder?"

"I MUST find healthy young cattle, my lord," said Bonfadini, "and inject a certain poison into the body of one. Several injections. At the end of a month the beef sickens and dies. When the body is corrupt, after a certain number of days, the liquids are drawn off and distilled. They have not the strength of the original poison. They are far more terrible. Death itself has helped to strengthen them.

"This fine juice I inject into another beef, which dies, and the distilled product is introduced to a third, and so on, the virulence of the poison steadily growing, until at last I have only a certain process to crystallize a sediment in the quart of liquid which two years of labor will have given to me. There remains a few pinches of powder to which I add a certain perfume of my invention. The rest my lord knows better than any man."

"Beautiful, eh, Machiavelli?" asked the duke.

"So in all art," said the Florentine. "Patience makes the perfect thing. No one but Bonfadini has raised murder to a fine art."

"And still," said the duke, "you notice that he says nothing. 'A certain poison . . .' and 'a certain number of days . . .' and 'a certain perfume . . .' It's plain that you will not entrust your secrets to me, Bonfadini."

"My lord, I merely remove temptation from your hands."

"Like a good priest, eh?"

The Borgia laughed. "Now tell me what I have gained from all of this?"

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"No matter what the eye-witnesses testify," said Machiavelli, "the generals will not believe that it was the hand of God which struck down their messenger. No one in Italy will believe it."

"I don't care what they believe, so long as they don't understand. Always to be successful and never to be understood is the secret of greatness. So long as Italy fears me, it will follow me. Is that true?"

"Very true," said Machiavelli.

He began to peel an apple, cutting the paring translucently thin, using a very sharp pen-knife."

He said as he peeled the fruit: "You have convinced the generals that their messenger was murdered. They will make a strong head against you."

"On the contrary," said the Borgia, "out of all of this, I shall make a net in which I shall catch every one of the generals."

"In what manner?" asked Machiavelli.

"Who is the most honest man about me—barring my faithful Bonfadini?" asked the duke.

"Why, red-headed, fire-eating Tizzo, I suppose," said the Florentine.

"He is the net I will use to catch the traitors, one and all."

"But Tizzo is not a fool."

"Certainly not. He is as suspicious as a cat. But I shall make his suspicions the lever through which I work on him. Once I satisfy his doubts, he will be my devoted servant again."

CHAPTER II.

STATECRAFT EXTRAORDINARY.

CAPTAIN TIZZO, when the summons from the duke came to him, was walking rapidly up and down his room, snapping questions at his father who, like the rough old soldier that he was, sat cross-legged on a cushion on the floor and whittled a stick of wood into a monk's head, using his dagger for a knife.

"Was it a natural death?" asked Tizzo.

"I never saw a heartier lad than that Malatesta," said Baron Melrose.

"But no hand touched him; he tasted nothing."

"Perhaps he tasted something when he was first brought to the town, and it only worked on him as he stood before the duke."

"It was strange," said Tizzo. "At the very moment when Beatrice was named—then like an invisible sword he was struck down."

"It is easier to understand the devil than to know the Borgia," said Melrose.

And here came the message from the duke that Tizzo was wanted. He followed to the door, turned back to buckle on his sword, and then straightened his coat of blue velvet, slashed with silver.

"You look fine enough for a marriage or a murder," said his father. "Run along, Tizzo."

He went at once into the presence of the Borgia.

"Sit down, my captain," said the Borgia, cheerfully.

"I have things to say that I can speak better standing," said Tizzo.

"Your hair is such flame that it keeps your brain seething," said the duke. "What's the trouble now?"

Bonfadini came behind the duke's chair and leaned on it.

"The trouble, for one thing, is the rat-faced poisoner who keeps at your elbow," said Tizzo.

"Go into the corner of the room," said the duke to Bonfadini.

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Bonfadini turned on Tizzo a smile of exquisite malice and obeyed the order with his whispering step.

"Now what's the matter, Tizzo?"

"My lord, I was bound to your service for three months. That time is almost up."

"It is ended now, if you wish."

"Ended now?" exclaimed Tizzo, bewildered.

"Come, come!" smiled the Borgia, lolling on the pillows of the couch, to which he had gone from his chair. "Did you think that I was saving you till the last moment, to throw you away on one final, desperate exploit? Is that what you think of me?"

"I don't know what to think of you, my lord," said Tizzo.

"If you want your freedom, you have it now. And whatever else you ask."

"Whatever else?"

"Yes. Do you think that I forget I owe Urbino and Forli to you? I would be more a beast than a man if that were the case. Tizzo, ask and I grant it."

Here the duke cast a side glance at Machiavelli and saw the Florentine staring with wonder. It was not the sort of statecraft that the philosopher expected from his hero.

"Lady Beatrice—" said Tizzo, and then stopped, choked by the expectation of refusal.

"She loves you; she is promised to you by her brother; and though she is in my hands as a hostage—and though, mark you, her brother is in arms against me—I give her to you freely, Tizzo."

Tizzo drew himself up with a great breath. His face turned almost as red as his hair. He bowed profoundly.

"My lord," said he, "you are kind. By heaven," he broke out, "I can't help believing that most of the things said against you are lies!"

"Most of the things that are said against every one are lies," anwered the Borgia. "Do you hear me?"

"I hear you and mark you, my lord."

"And whoever has told you that you are not like my right hand has told a very poisonous lie, Tizzo. What else do you wish?"

"My father to ride with me?"

"Certainly. He is free to go as he pleases. He came to me merely because of you, and he has fought like a hundred men for your sake. Take this to him and my kindest greeting."

HE took from his neck a golden chain which supported as a pendant a single ruby of great size and beauty, with a candle flame burning in the heart of it. This he dropped into the hand of Tizzo and, to the side, noted the amazement of Machiavelli again.

"What else, Tizzo?" he demanded.

"I am ashamed to ask. But it is possible to take back gifts. I would like to have the escort of my company of the Romagnols for a few miles out of the camp."

"Asked like a sensible man of the world—a thing I thought you never would become, Tizzo. Bonfadini, go at once and order Tizzo's company to be mustered under arms. Take them with you wherever you please, my friend, unless the cost of them will be too heavy for your purse. Take them to my revolting generals and they'll be delighted to have such a fine unit of infantry. You have made them a company of heroes, Tizzo."

"Wait, Bonfadini!" called Tizzo.

The poisoner halted, and turned slowly.

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"My lord," said Tizzo, "I see that I have been a dog to doubt you. But when Malatesta fell a little time ago, I was sure that it was because he had been murdered by your command. And when I looked on the floor for the letter to me which he had been reading, it was gone. But I see now that I have been a fool and that your intentions are kind and honorable to me. I cannot leave you until my time of service is completed."

"You must and shall go, Tizzo," said the duke. "Better to have one free friend than a thousand hired retainers. You must go. Take the Romagnols with you. They love you like a father. They are my parting gift, besides the money in this purse."

"I cannot take it, my lord," said Tizzo, overcome.

"You shall take it, however. It is yours. And that is not the end of the supply. What, man? Do you think I forget the towers of Urbino, and the rich plains around Forli? Tizzo, to the day of my death, my purse is yours. You have taught me what an honest man can be. Bonfadini, carry my order, and send word to the Lady Beatrice to prepare herself for travel in the morning. She is returning to her family. Captain Tizzo and his father escort her. Good night, Tizzo.

"You will want this evening to make your preparations. Your company will be under arms and ready for you at dawn. A good voyage to you. I say farewell now, because you know that it's hard for me to leave my bed in the morning."

"My lord, there must be one last service that I can do for you," said Tizzo.

"Nothing. Not a thing. Only give my compliments to Giovanpaolo Baglione and tell him he'll be your brother-in-law before long—that I am sorry he listened to fools and cowards and turned against me. Tell the rest of them that if they wish to meet me in Sinigaglia in a few days, I shall be there with an entirely open mind. I can forget the past, Tizzo. Tell them that. God knows that I've been a cruel fellow in my time, and I suppose I can be cruel again. If war has to come, it will be war to the knife. They understand that already. But a bit of quiet conversation might make us all friends."

"I remember every word," said Tizzo, "and I'll repeat it exactly. I believe you, and I hope I can make them believe in you, also."

"I think you can, Tizzo," said the duke, calmly. "Go to bed. Sleep well. And away with you in the morning. We'll see each other often again. Two like you and me cannot live long in one country without meeting often."

HE stood up and walked to the door with Tizzo, opening it with his own hand.

"The trouble with the generals," he said, "is that they're afraid of the size I've grown to—partly with your help. Well, tell them that the greater I grow, the bigger my friends will become, and the better I can crush my enemies. Farewell! Good fortune!"

And as he closed the door and turned around towards Machiavelli, he found the Florentine leaning forward in his chair, his chin resting on one hand, a faint smile on his face.

"Do you understand, now?" asked the duke.

"The Lady Beatrice, also?" said Machiavelli.

"You can't understand that?"

"She's a beautiful thing, my lord."

"She is, Niccolò."

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"And beauty has a higher price in Italy than all the other virtues. I mean, beauty *is* a virtue in Italy."

"Do you think I am surrendering her foolishly?"

"You might marry her off to some very great man, my lord. Or establish her as the mistress of some prince of importance."

"I could. And I intend to."

"Ah? Do you think that the Baglione will send her back into your hands?"

"They won't send her. They will drop her into my hands, Niccolò."

"There I fail to follow you," said Machiavelli.

"Well, then—in the first place what will happen when Tizzo talks to the generals?"

"I think he may convince them that you mean well. Liars are always persuaded by a greater lie. But the most persuasive thing in the world is a lie honestly told by an honest man. Tizzo is honest."

"If he were not so honest, he might become a great man in the world, my friend. Yes, I think that Tizzo will draw them all to Sinigaglia like birds into a limed net."

"And there?"

"They must die, Niccolò. They know me too well, they suspect me too much, and already they've raised their hands against me. I am about to give Italy a final lesson in statecraft, the greatest it ever has seen."

"And Lady Beatrice?"

"That girl is the only human being—except Machiavelli — who understands me. I can see the men being persuaded by Tizzo. I can see the girl vainly warning them like another Cassandra. I can see the generals riding off to Sinigaglia, and Tizzo along with them, to give them warrant that he meant what he said to me. And I can see Beatrice—she's a girl all fire, Niccolò—slipping after them. She would follow Tizzo into fire as red as his own hair. And therefore, in Sinigaglia, I expect to hang the generals and take Lady Beatrice again."

"And Tizzo?" said the Florentine.

"My dear Niccolò, why do you ask painful questions?"

"Of course — of course!" said Machiavelli. "It's clearly logical that he must die."

CHAPTER III.

ARRIVAL OF TIZZO.

GIOVANPAOLO BAGLIONE, young, handsome, smiling, the grim Orsini, three of them, Oliverotto da Ferma, Vitellozzo Vitelli, all sat about a table at the tavern, Oliverotto was paring the rind from his slice of cheese and smiling at his thoughts; the Orsini drank their wine in silence, being silent men; Vitellozzo held his head high because his pride never left him, even at the table; and Giovanpaolo regarded the others with his own inimitable calm.

A murmur from the verge of the town swelled suddenly into a strong shouting as voices nearer at hand took up the cry: "Duca! Duca!"

Vitellozzo looked as though he had been stabbed to the heart. His face withered with pain and with fear.

"Giovanpaolo!" he called out. "Is Cesare Borgia in Sinigaglia here with us?"

"Hush! Hush!" cried Oliverotto, who had run to the door and thrown it wide. "You can hear something else!"

They were able to make it out, cheering and laughter combined, and always the cry: "Duca! Duca! Tizzo! Tizzo!"

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Giovanpaolo began to clap his hands and laughed with happiness.

"But wait!" called Vitellozzo. "You're safe enough with Tizzo; yet how about the rest of us? We've heard that Tizzo is a blind servant to Cesare Borgia. What if he's come her to cut our throats and send our heads back to his master in a basket? What about that? We are not bound to Tizzo by long services as you are!"

"Do you know him?" asked Giovanpaolo.

"No. I've never seen his face."

"If you talk to him for five minutes you'll forget to be afraid. He's the most honest man in Italy, Vitellozzo. When the Borgia plans his murders, he doesn't pick Tizzo to execute them. Depend on it. We're safer than before if we have Tizzo with us."

"But what if he's the vanguard of the Borgia army?"

"Our outposts would have sent in word that the army is coming," protested the Baglione. "Wait till you see Tizzo."

The clamor poured echoing down the street and approached the tavern.

"What's to be our position here?" exclaimed Oliverotto. "Here we are each with a little army of our own and all, nominally, in the service of Cesare Borgia. And here comes part of the rest of Borgia's army to enter the city which we're holding for him. Now I ask you, what shall we do? Shall we declare open war with Borgia, seize Tizzo and his men as prisoners, and defy the duke and all his hired men? Or shall we attempt to honor the duke in the person of Tizzo? Answer up brightly, my friends!"

"There's no need to," said Giovanpaolo. "The uproar's going past us and Tizzo isn't coming in here, after all."

For the shouting of "Duca! Duca!" was in fact streaming on down the street.

"But if he came this way, it's because he wants to see us," said Vitellozzo. "Why should he go by us?"

"He has red hair and an unsettled brain," said Oliverotto. "One can expect anything from him."

The youngest of the Orsini remarked: "He is a mongrel—half English and half Italian. What can you expect from him?"

"Wine, gentlemen? Did I hear you call for wine?" asked a servile voice at the door.

And in came a figure with a white cap set on the head and a white cloth over the arm, carrying a tray loaded with red wine.

Giovanpaolo Baglione, at the casement, was listening with bowed, attentive head, to the passing of the clamor down the street.

"Here—serve the wine!" exclaimed the young Orsini. "I need a drink and I need it badly. Don't stumble over my foot, you fool."

"Keep your feet out of the way, then, you blockhead," said the other.

THE words jumped Orsini fiercely to his feet, with a hand on his sword, but he saw that the man who had just put down the tray had now thrown off the white cloth, the white cap, and revealed a head of flaming red hair, a light breastplate of steel chased with gold, and a light sword belted high on his hip.

"Tizzo!" shouted Giovanpaolo from the casement, turning suddenly around. "Be careful, Orsini. Take your hand from your sword. If you try to handle this flame, it will burn you to the bone. Give him your hand. Tizzo, I make you known to my

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friends. Oliverotto, Vitellozzo, the Orsini. Men you should have known long before this. Why did you come slipping in among us like this?"

"I beg your pardons," said Tizzo to them all, "but I came into Sinigaglia with no more than a hundred tough Romagnol peasants behind me and if your highnesses decided to be angry, you could have swallowed me in a single mouthful. So I decided that I would have a look at your faces."

"And how do the faces seem to you?" asked the young Orsini, darkly.

"They seem to me like men who are as honest as they have to be," answered Tizzo, calmly and quickly.

"I smell an insult in that!" exclaimed Orsini.

"Your nose is long enough to sniff into corners," said Tizzo.

"I'll stand no more!" shouted Orsini, snatching out his sword. Giovanpaolo, running in, struck down the blade.

"You shall not fight," said the Baglione. "Tizzo, what sort of fire-brained foolishness is all this? Orsini, put up your sword! Tizzo, you are to blame!"

"Am I to blame?" said Tizzo, carelessly. "My lord Orsini, I ask your pardon, if I am to blame. And Giovanpaolo, who is the perfect knight, says that I am at fault. Will you give me your hand?"

The Orsini stretched out his, grudgingly. But in a moment the atmosphere of the room had lightened a great deal, and Tizzo was saying: "We've heard a great deal about hard feelings among you hired soldiers. We've heard that you were ready to turn on the duke of Romagna and try your best weapons against him. Is that the truth? I hope not. I've come ahead of his army to find out what's in your mind."

Oliverotto had been dropping the heavy links of a gold chain through his fingers. He stopped this, now, to look up and say: "You've rented your hand and your heart and your soul to Cesare Borgia, Tizzo, and every man in Italy knows it. And a lie told about a man's master is not a sin. However, you see that we can't take your word."

"Suppose that I'm free of the duke?" said Tizzo.

"If you were free of the duke, still you'd be bound to him," said Vitellozzo, "because the woman you love is held in his hands."

"Shall I prove to you that I'm in fact a free man?" asked Tizzo.

"Prove it if you can, my friend," said Oliverotto.

"Nothing more easy," said Tizzo.

It was a big room, low of ceiling, the heavy wooden beams discolored by sooty incrustations, because the fireplace smoked badly. At the farther end two curtained doorways communicated with the rooms beyond; and it was towards these curtains that Tizzo now turned and waved his hand.

"It's safe enough, I think," said he.

AND out of the shadowy curtains two figures came forward into the light. The one had the red face and the huge shoulders of the baron of Melrose; the other was Lady Beatrice Baglione, covered by the sweeping length of a dark cloak. Giovanpaolo ran to his sister with an outcry of wonder and of happiness.

"Is the Borgia drunk?" asked Oliverotto. "Or has Tizzo managed to get his father and the lady away by some sleight or trick?"

"What do you know of Cesare Borgia?" asked Tizzo.

"I know murder of him!" stated the older Orsini.

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"So do I," said Tizzo. "But I also know that he keeps his friends."

"We are not friends of his, and we've proved it by rebelling against him," said Oliverotto.

"Stop the rebellion and he'll welcome you back in his service. That's what I've come to tell you."

"Ah, he sent you on before him?" suggested Giovanpaolo. "And you're to persuade us, and flatter us, and bribe us here and there? Is that it, Tizzo? And Beatrice is even sent along to make us feel that the tiger for once has his fill of meat and is ready to sleep and be petted? Is that the game of it?" Beatrice went up to Tizzo and waited for his answer. But he merely laughed at the concern of Giovanpaolo.

"Not one of you knows what a man he is!" said Tizzo. "What he's done is partly for himself and partly for the sake of Italy. But the rest of you think of nothing by plundering a town here, or making a rich marriage there. I tell you, there's no fear in him, either.

"He doesn't fear the strength of all of you combined. He's marching on Sinigaglia now, and you'll hear his trumpets in the morning. Make up your minds by that time what you intend to do. If you want peace, you shall have it. If you want war, he promises to wash the streets of Sinigaglia with blood."

The others stood silent for a moment. Giovanpaolo said: "The truth is this. If we join the duke now, there's hardly a power in Italy that can stand against us. But if we make him too great, he'll simply be fattening us before he cuts our throats and roasts us on a fire. Now, my dear lads, think it over wisely and well. Let Beatrice tell us what she thinks of the duke."

Beatrice sat in a tall-backed chair and smiled on the generals.

She said: "I'll tell you the truth as I see it about him. He likes well enough a man he can use. He's used Tizzo to capture Forli and Urbino. So of course, he is kind to him. More than kind. He even sends him away and sets him free from danger. I was held as a guarantee of the sword of Giovanpaolo. But he gave me up at once when Tizzo said that he couldn't leave without me."

"Do you make that into a villainy?" demanded Tizzo.

"I make nothing. But since you're too honest for the Borgian statecraft, he would try to stretch your honesty far enough to use it for a mask. The rest of you may do as you please, but I'll plead with Giovanpaolo on my knees not to join this foolish alliance. Cesare Borgia will feast you in the morning and murder you by noon, and I know it by instinct."

Vitellozzo said suddenly: "Actions mean more than words. Consider this. No one has done more than Tizzo for the duke. Forli and Urbino are two prizes worth having in hand. And here is Tizzo contracted for a certain period to the service of the duke but set free the instant he requests it. Not only that, but Beatrice Baglione is freed also, and the father of Tizzo. The rest of you may think what you please, but I say with Plato that virtue can be learned and that the Borgia seems to have learned it. I'm ready to join him again."

"Vitellozzo Vitelli, I can see you with your hands tied behind your back and the sword at your throat!" said Lady Beatrice.

HE looked at her with a scowl. He was young. Too much success, too much power in his youth had given him an excess of age in his face.

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He was dressed with an almost feminine luxury. He kept gripping and relaxing his grasp from the handle of a dagger at the butt of which there was a big emerald, like a great cat's-eye.

"We take our advice from men, not from girls," said he. "You hear what I decide on, all of you. Now you can do as you please."

They stared at one another. In all Italy a more priceless crew of cutthroats could not have been gathered, except that Giovanpaolo Baglione was a man of honor as great as his courage. He stood up and threw a cloak over his shoulders.

"The rest of you can do as you please," he said. "I leave Sinigaglia to you and the Borgia. Beatrice, come with me."

"Giovanpaolo, I can't go and leave Tizzo behind us in this trap," said the girl.

"Whether you want to or not," said he, "you *must* go."

Tizzo went to her and led her by the arm from the room. After he had passed through the door, with Baglione behind him, Vitellozzo said: "You see that Tizzo trusts the Borgia absolutely. Isn't that proof enough for us?"

And slowly the heads of the others were nodded.

CHAPTER IV.

THE SHREWD MACHIAVELLI.

THERE was trouble with Vitellozzo in the morning. During his sleep of the night he had a vision of Giovanpaolo in which the Baglione warned him with a gloomy brow and a raised finger that he was only one day from the start of a long residence in hell. Paolo Orsini, on the other hand, worked to persuade the captain, and finally he consented to start forward with the others to welcome the duke. He refused to ride a horse but said that he wanted a mule under him for the sake of the sure footing.

What he said on this morning was long remembered by men.

"When a man quits his instinct and follows his reason, it is time for him to have a surer seat than a horse can give him."

All of the words and the actions of Vitellozzo during this day were overclouded by a strange sense of doom. Everything he did or said was recalled afterward by the witnesses.

When he rode out with the rest of the generals, he kept to the rear on his mule. His head was down and he shook it from side to side now and again. Tizzo, riding the white stallion at his side, said: "Vitellozzo, if you feel the devil elbowing you in the ribs, why don't you turn back?"

The hired soldier merely raised his head and stared at Tizzo, with a blank, uncomprehending eye. Afterwards the father of Tizzo said to him: "That Vitellozzo is seeing shadows at midday. There will be trouble ahead of us all!"

There was a check when the long column of the army of the Borgia came in view. The generals who had been in revolt had spread their forces in varying directions towards Ancona. The troops of Vitellozzo, for instance, were quartered in Morro and Fiumessino, a dozen miles south and east of Sinigaglia. The duke came on with five hundred chosen men-at-arms in the lead of his column.

These men were under the command of Ludovico di Mirandola and Raffaello de' Pazzi. Next came a picked thousand of Gascon and Swiss infantry, men able to stand off the charge of cavalry with their pikes and blast

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the mounted men with the fire from their arquebuses. The main body followed behind, raising a great dust cloud, and with the brilliant uniforms of the Romagnol infantry gleaming through the dust.

The generals from Sinigaglia drew rein when they saw the imposing force. Oliverotto shouted suddenly: "There! Do you see it? There's the trap, and Vitellozzo was right from the first!"

One of the Orsini turned sharply to Tizzo with murder in his face.

"*You* knew what would happen, Tizzo!" he exclaimed.

"What will happen?" muttered Tizzo, frowning. "A friendly meeting is what will happen. Look!" He pointed.

Ahead of them, at the slow pace of a walking mule, Vitellozzo was riding forward alone his head still slightly depressed, as though he saw nothing worthy of concern in the imposing host that was moving towards them.

Oliverotto groaned and then laughed.

"Well, if the devil is taking charge of us, we'll have to go where he beckons," said the general, and they all went forward towards the Borgia.

Cesare Borgia, on an ambling pad that looked hardly as large as its rider, swept out from the head of the column with half a dozen of his leaders around him. He was completely armed in the finest plate that gleamed with a reddish cast, there was so much gold chased over the surface of the armor. His head alone was bare, the long hair blowing, and his face dimmed by the usual mask. It seemed to Tizzo that the eyes of the duke were flashing with an extra brilliance as he rode up.

In the background was the white face of Bonfadini the poisoner, and near Bonfadini rode that man of increasing fame, Niccolò Machiavelli, with his faint smile that made his face look like that of a cat.

Reining his pad back to a walk as he drew near, the Borgia called out heartily: "Where is my brother, Vitellozzo?"

THEN he seemed to make sure of the repentant rebel for the first time and rode straight to him. He leaned from his saddle and caught the arm of Vitellozzo to prevent him from dismounting, then kissed him affectionately.

The duke said, so that all could hear: "The best of friends make the shrewdest of enemies, Vitellozzo. But now we are home again in one house."

Vitellozzo answered: "Perhaps so, my lord. I see we are to have the same devil with us."

"What devil?" asked the duke.

"The white one," said Vitellozzo, and pointed at Bonfadini.

Everyone in Italy knew the singular talent of Bonfadini, but Cesare Borgia laughed openly and loudly when he heard the remark.

"My dear Vitellozzo," he said, "a sin loses most of its taint when it's exposed to the open day. You must admit that."

The white face of Bonfadini, for the first time in the knowledge of men, slowly turned scarlet. Tizzo looked at the cold devil with amazement. And Vitellozzo said: "If I die in my sleep, tonight, my ghost will know whom to blame for the quick trip to heaven."

The duke was greeting the others, one by one. When he came to Tizzo, he laid his big hand on the shoulder of his captain and said: "Honesty is a new policy for me, Tizzo. But I think it's going to prove the best one."

At this, his own staff and the men

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from Sinigaglia all laughed. They rode on together. The men-at-arms who followed, seeing this amicable reunion, all began to shout and cheer and cry: "Duca! Duca! Vitellozzo! Orsini! Tizzo! Oliverotto! Duca! Duca!" for they could see that some hard and dangerous fighting was being avoided by this reconciliation. The news spread back through the column. All the way into Sinigaglia there was a continual cheering from the rearward ranks.

Tizzo listened carefully to every word the duke spoke. Paolo Orsini was very bold. He said to the Borgia, frankly: "You always have hated me and my house, my lord."

"That's true," said the Borgia. "But why should I refuse to use one of the sharpest swords in Italy, even if my enemy has put the edge to it?"

Paolo Orsini laughed. He said: "Every man with a clear head and a strong hand ought to be in your service, my lord. If that could happen, Italy would soon be one country, and never a Frenchman or a Swiss in it."

"Or a Spaniard, either," said Vitellozzo.

There was a slight, embarrassed pause. The reference to the Spanish blood of the Borgias was too direct and insulting, but the duke turned to Vitellozzo and said calmly: "You stab at me, Vitellozzo, but a dagger of words has no point—not when a friend uses it."

"My lord, you mistook me," said Vitellozzo.

But there was a sour twist of satisfaction on his face. All of these men, Tizzo could see, feared the duke to the cores of their hearts, but they were unwilling to rejoin him and submit to his leadership without making some gestures of an independent mind and spirit.

Cesare Borgia said: "But where is the noble Giovanpaolo Baglione?"

He looked at Tizzo, who answered: "He is gone towards Perugia."

"And his sister with him?" asked the Borgia, sharply.

"The Lady Beatrice is with him," admitted Tizzo.

"Do you hear, Niccolò?" asked the duke.

"I said it before the thing happened," answered Machiavelli.

"You did," agreed the duke. "I am going to listen to you more carefully. After all, the Florentine brain is the finest in the world, as all men will admit."

"It's the finest for intrigue, at least," put in Oliverotto, and stared sternly at Machiavelli.

He did not like the young statesman. None of the soldiers, in fact, could endure him in spite of the smoothness of his address.

Machiavelli said: "Oliverotto, you ought to know that intrigue is what unties the strings of the purse, and if the purse were tied up, where would we find the brave Oliverottos?"

"Now, what the devil does he mean by that?" demanded the captain, turning his back on Machiavelli.

"I will write it out for you," said Machiavelli, "and let you study the meaning at your leisure."

"Ha?" exclaimed Oliverotto, and turned sharply back to glare at Machiavelli. The passion of the soldier was so great that Tizzo half-expected to see a dagger drawn on the moment, but after looking into the faintly smiling face and the cold, bright eyes of the Florentine for a moment, Oliverotto muttered a few indistinct words and turned his scowling glance back on the road.

Vitellozzo laughed loudly. "To lose

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one's temper is a luxury that most of us have to pay for, Oliverotto," he said.

But the other general said nothing.

CHAPTER V.

A MAD DOG.

WHEN Cesare Borgia and his army approached Sinigaglia, the first act of the Borgia was to send Lorenzo Ridi, one of his fiercest captains and best fighters, with a dozen picked lances straight through the city with word to gallop the heart out of their horses until they managed to overtake and kill Giovanpaolo Baglione. The orders were secret. The other hired soldiers must know nothing about this, but the Borgia felt, and he was right, that half his work was undone, if the most famous of all the hired soldiers managed to escape scot free.

So that chosen detachment rushed through Sinigaglia, crossed its moated drawbridges, and swept off on the Perugia road. The word was that Giovanpaolo, since his own army was at a great distance, had left the city with only his sister and perhaps one or two more companions. Therefore the pursuit hastened with red spurs, and they were soon in the hills, with a widening view of the town just behind them.

So they entered a narrow valley and raised close volleys of thunder from the sides. They rode in a stream that stretched out a full furlong, the best horses keeping well in the van. And as they approached a corner of the valley and the head of their scattered column galloped around the turn of the road, six mail-clad knights with spears in rest charged them.

Lorenzo Ridi went down with a deep spear-wound in his breast. Two more fell immediately behind him.

The fall of Lorenzo Ridi in itself would have been enough to unnerve his followers. And when they saw the solid front which the horsemen of Giovanpaolo offered, it seemed to them that they were seeing a wall of steel. This handful of escort had been picked up by the Perugian. With it, he scattered the group of Borgians and sent them fleeing more wildly than they had pursued.

When Giovanpaolo turned the head of his horse, he saw his sister already on her knees, disarming Lorenzo Ridi and trying to stanch the deadly flow of blood from his breast.

The man was young. He had a pale eye and a pale droop of mustaches. He was famous for ferocity and a savage delight in blood. Cesare Borgia used him constantly for desperately important or murderous missions.

Giovanpaolo dismounted, threw the reins of his horse to one of his men-at-arms, and stood by the prostrate form of Ridi. The other two men who had been stricken from their horses had not even been wounded. They were merely stunned from their falls.

Ridi said, calmly: "You held the spear that spitted me, Giovanpaolo."

"I held it," admitted the Baglione.

"Luck was with you," said Ridi. "It was the work of the damned armorer that left a weak joint there under the shoulder plate. However—Lady Beatrice, don't dirty your hands with me any longer. My life is dripping out of me. Nothing can stop it from running. Ah hai! To think of dying like this in a little skirmish at the first shock of the spears!"

The girl said nothing. She had grown a little pale. Now she went to a small run of water beside the road, washed her stained hands clean, and brought water to Lorenzo Ridi.

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He thanked her.

"Put my helmet under my head," he said. "This is poor business for you, Giovanpaolo. If you could have knocked me over and taken me alive, there would have been several thousand ducats of ransom money to gain for my life. Now you see it's coined into drops of blood that are worth nothing except to dogs and wolves. Or would you have ransomed me?"

"I ask you the question back," said the Baglione. "Would you have held me for ransom if you had captured me?"

Ridi looked up at him with a contented smile.

"I would have cut your throat, my friend," he said.

"Out of your own malice?"

"Orders, Giovanpaolo."

"From the Borgia?"

"Yes."

"What has happened in Sinigaglia?"

"Nothing—so far. But in a few minutes the slaughter will start."

"Ah, I was right in riding away?"

"Of course you were right," said the dying man. "There's no question of your rightness. But why the rest remained for the trap to close on them I can't understand."

"IT was Tizzo," answered Giovanpaolo. "He trusted the Borgia. And the amount of his trust outweighed the fear of the Orsini and the rest."

"True," agreed Ridi. "There's a strange fellow, now—that Tizzo. As quick as a cat and as strong as a lion; as clever as a sharp knife; and yet he cannot see through the Borgia. He lets himself be turned into the bait that will trap all the hired soldiers—even the trapping of Giovanpaolo, though he loves you more than he loves his own life."

"All?" asked the Baglione. "Will Vitellozzo be killed among the rest?"

"Yes. All. And Vitellozzo among the first. All of them may not be slaughtered in Sinigaglia. A few might be saved to take to Rome and let the people have a look at their deaths."

"And Tizzo himself?" asked Beatrice Baglione, putting out a hand to protect herself from the answer she feared.

"Why, you could answer that for yourself," suggested Ridi.

"Do you mean that he will be murdered by the Borgia devil?"

"Tell me what else could happen?" asked Ridi. "This Tizzo is strangely honest. He cannot fight except for a good cause. The Borgia has hoodwinked him by making him feel that all this war, murders, poisonings and all, has been for the sake of the great, new, united Italy. But when Tizzo finds that the duke has broken his faith and used him for a cat's-paw, the sword of Tizzo will be out. That axe of his will try to chop its way through the skull of the Borgia. There's no doubt of that. Once the generals are safely in hand, don't you see that the Borgia will have to kill Tizzo also, in self-defense?"

The girl did not cry out. She folded her hands together and stared at the distance. Then she stood up and withdrew, unnoticed. Ridi was turning very pale. His lips parted. His breathing came in gasps.

"Can I reach Perugia and bring back my army in time to strike?" muttered Giovanpaolo, thinking aloud.

"What good would your little army do against the Borgia's forces?" asked Ridi. "And by this time, even, the soldiers of the revolted generals are fraternizing with the Borgians. The

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townspeople are raising their yell of "Duca! Duca!" And before night the whole army of your friends will be in the hands of the duke. If you came against him, you would be swept down into the sea."

"It's true," murmured the Baglione.

He looked up and took a quick, deep breath.

The breathing of Ridi came, now, with a distinct, dry rattling.

"Ridi," said Giovanpaolo, "you are close to your end. Is there a last wish I can execute for you?"

"I think not," said Ridi.

"Can you tell me why you always have hated me so much?"

"Because," said Ridi, "I envied the brightness that always surrounded your name. I wanted to be what men said of you, and the devil in me always made my hand too quick to kill, always thickened my tongue so that I could not use your noble words."

"Those are poor grounds for hate," said Giovanpaolo. "Tell me, Ridi, if there is nothing that will rest your soul, and I'll surely try to do it for you after you are dead."

"Why, there's one thing," whispered the dying Ridi. "Lean closer, Giovanpaolo."

THE Baglione leaned far over the soldier, who with a sudden last effort jerked himself up on one elbow. Blood spurted from the frightful wound in his breast as he made the struggle. But with his right hand he snatched out his poniard and drove it straight at the unvisored face of the Baglione.

The first shadow of death already was dimming the eyes of Ridi, or that stroke would have been mortal. As it was, the needle-sharp point of the poniard stuck in the rim of the raised visor; the fine steel of the dagger burst into a thousand pieces, stinging and cutting the face of the Baglione. But there was no farther harm. Giovanpaolo sprang to his feet; and Lorenzo Ridi dropped dead in the dust.

"Carry him off the road," said Giovanpaolo to his men. "Leave his armor on him. He was a mad dog, but he had courage and a great heart. Leave him as he is, unplundered. My heart aches for Tizzo! Where is Lady Beatrice?"

"She took her horse a few minutes ago," was the answer.

"Her horse? Where did she ride? Up the road?"

"No, my lord. Strange to say, she went down the road a little distance."

"Down the road?" muttered Giovanpaolo. "How could that be?"

"I cannot tell, my lord."

The Baglione started and struck his mailed hands together.

"She would not be insane enough to try to get back to Tizzo with a warning?" he groaned. "She would not try to—but she would! She would! To horse and after her. A thousand ducats to the man who overtakes her!"

They were in the saddle instantly and thundering down the way, but at the next turn of the road they saw Beatrice Baglione far before them, bent in the saddle, whipping her horse to full speed.

"My lord!" called one of the men-at-arms. "We are riding straight back towards destruction. And we can't overtake her. Her horse is fast; she rides as well as a man; and she has not a man's weight."

Still for a moment Giovanpaolo urged his horse forward; but the heavy warhorse manifestly was losing the race against that slender-limbed Arab which carried the girl.

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At last he drew rein. The dust he had raised blew up from behind and swept past him. Bitterly he stared at the dwindling form that fled down the valley road.

CHAPTER VI.

BONFADINI'S PLEASURE.

A HERD of cattle bought by the Borgia money, numberless casks of strong red country wine, heaps of fruit, mountains of shining bread made a feast for the army and flooded the pockets of the happy Sinigaglians with hard cash. Song and shouting and laughter rang far away through the streets.

The feast for the generals was a different matter.

Cesare Borgia always was a lavish hand, and he was more lavish than ever, on this day.

He said to white-faced Bonfadini: "Let them swallow their last gifts—we'll cut open their crops and have the things back again!"

The generals—his own and those recently returned to him—sat at a long table while a crowd of servants passed around to serve them. The Borgia himself would not sit at the board. Now and again he came to his place at the head of the table and seemed about to take the chair there. But always he passed on again. From in front of the hearth he would lift his cup and pledge one of his generals. Or from the doorway he would be seen as he shouted some pleasantry.

"You know, my lord," said Vitellozzo Vitelli, "that some men fear to break bread and eat salt with others against whom they have evil intentions?"

"Are you there again, my fine raven, croaking?" laughed the Borgia. "Try some new feathers on your back, my friend, and see whether or not I am a friend!"

He waved his hand. At once two servants came in, carrying between them a long weight of the heaviest gold brocade. The cloth glittered. The pattern was exquisite. It seemed all a mass of jewels and precious metal, and a shout of admiration and of envy went up when the servants bore the little treasure to Vitellozzo.

The man was so greedy that he choked and could not swallow when he saw the gift. His hands trembled as he ran the tips of his fingers over the tracery. Then he began to laugh. His face became a violent red.

"I could be a Pope—I could be a king — I could be an emperor on a throne, if I wore a robe made of this!" he shouted. "Ah hai, Cesare, you know my tastes."

"Of course," said the Borgia. "Every one of us would like to sit on a throne."

He waved his hand again and two men carried in a fifty pound salver of solid silver and put it down in front of Paolo Orsini. The general weighted the thing and then shouted aloud. He began to catch up quantities of fruit from the center of the table where it was piled and make a bright mountain to top the silver tray. And still he was shouting.

All that shouting ended when on a little blue cushion a page, on one knee, presented to Oliverotto a single pearl.

He picked it up with a bewildered air. Then he rushed to the window and held the jewel in the cup of both hands. The sunlight, streaming through, made the pearl a mass of milky fire. The sheen of it seemed to strike Oliverotto to the soul; and the

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radiance poured again out at his eyes. He began to do an impromptu dance. Everyone left the table and rushed around him. Their eyes and teeth flashed as they saw the shining of the gem; but into the midst of this tumult more presents were carried, as varied as the taste, as rich as the magnificence of the Borgia could afford. And before and after every gift was presented, there was another round of wine.

And who was there to notice the pale face and the slender, dark form of Bonfadini, the poisoner, in the corner of the room?

To crown all, in came a pair of magnificent war-horses, each the purest white, in complete harness, with magnificent suits of armor tied to the saddles. The wooden floor shook and thundered under the striding of those great animals. Every man at the board felt himself three times an emperor. The Orsini who received that regal gift leaped up and made a speech.

He said: "Glorious Cesare! You are the last of the Romans and the first of the Italians. Who were the fools who told me to fear you? I shall take Italy for myself—from Torino to Palermo. Let Oliverotto have France. Vitellozzo can take Spain. And you, my lord, shall have the world.

"We will conquer it for you. You will have an army to send against Asia. You will trample the Turks to dust on the way and free Constantinople, liberate Jerusalem on the way. What way? The way to India and China. The way to forests of gold that bloom with jewels.

"You shall have a hundred thousand fierce French cavalry in your arm, a hundred thousand English axes and bows, a hundred thousand German and Flemish pikes, a hundred thousand Swiss and Italian arquebuses, and light cavalry.

"That is the way for my lord Cesare to conquer the world, while we lead on the divisions of the army. Life is beginning. The world is beginning. Rivers of gold are about to pour. Joy is the only air that we breathe!"

HE seized a great two-handled cup, lifted it, started to drink, found mere drinking too slow, and poured a red flood over himself from neck to foot. Then, staggering with drunkenness and joy, he began to laugh and wave the cup. It clipped a page in the head and knocked the lad senseless. The Orsini kicked the fallen body.

"Stand up, dog!" he shouted. "Do you lie down in the presence of the king of Italy?"

The whole crowd began to roar with laughter.

And Cesare Borgia said to cat-faced Machiavelli: "Do you see the token, Niccolò?"

"The token is red, my lord," answered Machiavelli. "I see it clearly. A flood of red!"

The Borgia smiled and passed on, always striding about the room.

That entertainment had been rapidly improvised but it was complete. There were not the gifts only, but there were musicians to fill up the interludes of happiness. There was a flock of slim dancing girls with wings of gauze fluttering behind them. There was a negro who ate fire, a juggler who filled the air with swords that never reached the floor.

And so the day wore on towards its conclusion, and as the evening approached wine and too much happiness began to overcome the feasters.

The Borgia made a speech to close the occasion. He said: "My friends,

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I have been at a little expense to show you how my heart stands towards you. If there ever was trouble in your minds, like yellow mud in a clear river, I hope it is all washed away to sea now. Clean rivers and a clean sky. Clean eyes and clean hopes. And our hands linked together will be a force to crack the back of all opposition. Go to bed, my friends. Sleep. Have happy dreams, and tomorrow we will start turning those dreams of yours into a bright reality."

They began to troop out. As they passed, the Borgia called to Tizzo. He was left alone in the big room, littered with scraps of food, overturned chairs, broken wine cups, the floor wet with the spilled wine, the air sour with the smell of it. A fire began to crackle cheerfully on the hearth and there was now no other light. In the midst of that confusion, Tizzo was left alone with Bonfadini, the poisoner, with Machiavelli, and with Cesare Borgia.

"You have been thoughtful, Tizzo," said the duke.

"My lord," said Tizzo, "I am always thoughtful when I see that the host does not drink with his guests."

"I was waiting for you to commence with your wine," said the Borgia.

Tizzo looked at him narrowly and the duke covered a bit of confusion with an apparently happy laughter.

"Your father was as free with his wine as the rest," pointed out the Borgia.

"He is a man who never thinks except when he has a sword in his hand," answered Tizzo.

"A foolish time for thinking," said the Borgia. "But now, Tizzo, I am going to tell you why you have been so sour and sad."

"Tell me, then, my lord."

"It is because when all the gifts went round the table, there was nothing given to Tizzo."

But Tizzo smiled and shrugged his shoulders. "What gift do I need?" he asked. "I have an axe, a sword, and the loveliest woman in the world. My lord knew of these things and therefore he would not waste himself and his money trying to find new gifts for me. Besides, I am under contract to serve you."

"No longer, Tizzo. I have set you free from the contract."

"However that may be, I am happy enough about myself, but I am not happy about the others. I watched you lift your cup many times, but the wine never passed your lips."

"Do you think so? Well, Tizzo, I'll drink alone with you, now," said the duke.

"Will Bonfadini be the wine-bearer?" asked Tizzo.

"Ah, Tizzo, do you still suspect me? Will you always suspect me?"

"If these men who are in your hands should die tonight, the whole of the Romagna would be in your hands," said Tizzo.

"Of course it would. A thing I have thought about," said the duke. "But if I did such a thing, all honest men would shrink from me, and the first one to shrink would be Tizzo."

"My lord, if there were such a murder, I would not shrink from you," said Tizzo.

"You would come hunting for me with your sword, I think," said the duke, curiously.

Tizzo smiled and said no more. "Am I free to leave you, my lord?" he asked.

"Free," said the duke. "Unless you wish to stay and hear how I intend to reward you not with brocade or pearls but with real honor and power."

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"I shall leave that till tomorrow," said Tizzo. "My lord is too weary with all his hospitality."

And that was the way he left the Borgia and retreated from the hall.

Afterwards, the remaining three looked silently at one another for a moment.

"Did you hear?" asked the Borgia, at last.

"He suspects everything," said Bonfadini.

"If I spare him, can I possibly win him back after he knows that I have betrayed the others?"

"My lord," said Machiavelli, "in Tizzo, honesty is an incurable disease."

"It is true," said the duke. "Therefore—Bonfadini, make account of him first of all. I leave him in your perfect hands."

"My lord," said the white-faced poisoner, "this is the greatest honor and pleasure you ever have done me. I have hated him with all my heart!"

CHAPTER VII.

A CAT IN A TREE.

BETWEEN the southward branch of the River Misa and the southern gate of Sinigaglia lay the Borgo, where the poorest houses stood. And not a shack in the entire quarter equalled in wretchedness the little shed where the Jew, Sinigaglia by name, kept his stock of clothes old and new. His new clothes cost less than old clothes would cost inside the gate. He had taken the name of the town that sheltered him because his own name would not have been easily enunciated by Italian lips.

He was a long, lean, cadaver of a man with a tuft of beard that jutted straightforward. Always, by night and day, he seemed to be standing against a high wind, his eyes forever squinted almost shut and water winking out of them. He was a dirty old man whose hands were never softened by water, his mouth never cleansed by wine. And he stood now, towards the close of the day, at the rack where his second-hand clothes are hung, probing among them, making his selling talk according to one of his many lines of chatter; except that now he was making such a sale as he never had made before.

He would have sold that entire stock of clothing for a ducat and rubbed his hands over the bargain. But now he was asking in his whining voice a ducat for a single outfit.

The reason was that a girl was making the purchase. All the wrappings of her big cloak would not have been able to disguise her femininity in spite of the erect fearlessness of her carriage.

The Jew had looked through her at the first glance.

He said: "Here is a doublet better than new, because it was noble wine that stained it. Here is a pair of hose that will go with it. Do you see how one leg is yellow and the other plum-colored? You would look like a brave young sprig in that outfit. You can see the shoes, yonder. I throw them in without a price, because I am sorry when a girl wants to go dressed like a man. There's no honesty in that. But be of bright cheer. The night will cover you. Shame has no eyes in the dark. But look—this will fit you perfectly. Will you try it?"

Lady Beatrice took the garment with a careless hand.

"Here is your money beforehand," she said. "A ducat for the clothes and another ducat if you will stand at the

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entrance to your shop and keep everyone out."

He took the money, carried it to the dull glimmer of the lamp, bit the good silver, and suddenly pouched it with a shudder of avaricious joy. Then he went to the door, muttering, and stood there as wan and meager as a scarecrow.

The girl tossed aside her clothes hastily. The chill of the evening washed her bare flesh. She pulled on the second-hand clothes with an indescribable loathing. Her cloak she swung over her shoulders again and pulled on the pair of chipped and battered gloves. At her belt there was a small dagger.

This was her one security against prying danger.

When she came to the door of the shed, the old Jew was muttering: "Two ducats, two ducats, two ducats! Oh, God, how much wealth comes to unworthy hands, and how little into mine who would cherish it!"

Then he added to the girl: "Think again, my child. The soldiers of the Borgia are inside the gate of the city. They have eyes sharper than gimlets. They have hands as cruel as the teeth of wolves. Even if your lover wears velvet, do not go into the city tonight. I once had a daughter."

"Have you heard whispers of murder from Sinigaglia?" she asked.

"A thousand whispers; and I have seen some of the dead," said the Jew.

"Ah, my God!" breathed the girl. "Have you seen dead men? Today?"

"Not today. Night is a better time for murder," he answered. "Why do you ask about today? Is it some young page who waits on one of the generals? Murder will not come the way of the very young, except by accident or by jealousy. Has he made his master jealous? Yes, if the general should see your pretty face. If you wish to do good to your lover, let no other man see him in your company."

"Farewell!" said the girl, and went hastily on towards the gate of the city, where the big lanterns already were lighted.

SHE went into a wine-shop where soldiers were drinking, and bought a round for them all. They looked at her with bleared eyes.

"Your father will beat you when you get home," said one of them. "How do you come by so much money, lad?"

"My father is dead and I sold his house yesterday," said the girl. "That is why I have a little money left in my purse tonight."

"What will you do when the last of the money is gone?" asked a burly fellow in the gaudy uniform of the Borgia's Romagnol companies.

"I'll become a soldier," she said.

"Will you? Let me see your hand!"

She pulled out her dagger and showed him her hand gripping it. At this, all the wine-drinkers began to laugh.

"A hand for a bodkin, not for a sword," said a halberdier.

"Whose soldier are you?" asked the girl.

"I serve the famous Oliverotto," said the halberdier.

"Ah, he is a great name," said the girl.

"Yes, and a great brain, too," answered the halberdier.

"And you?" she asked of a pikeman.

"Vitellozzo is my captain."

"That is a famous man, too. Who is your leader?" she repeated to the Romagnol peasant.

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"Tizzo," he answered, and grinned, sitting up straighter.

"Tizzo?" she echoed. "Tizzo? Who is it that they call Tizzo? I never heard of him?"

"Open your ears, you young fool," said the peasant, "and you will hear plenty about him! He is the man who won Forli and Urbino for the great duke!"

"I never heard of him," she replied. "I suppose he is one of the lesser officers?"

"Lesser?" shouted the Romagnol, angrily. "Lesser, do you say? Ask this man what would happen if Tizzo stood at sword's length from Oliverotto or Vitellozzo, with weapons in their hands!"

The halberdier answered: "Well, a general is something more than a duellist of a jouster. Tizzo does very well with his axe and his sword. But I'm talking about generalship. I'd rather follow a brain than a swordsman."

"What brain opened Forli and took the Rocca? What brain captured Urbino?" asked the peasant, growing hot with anger.

"Oh, I'm tired of hearing of that," said the halberdier.

"I'm not tired of telling about it, though," said the Romagnol.

Lady Beatrice asked, casually: "He may have had good fortune and a sharp sword. But he's not one to be kept with the famous leaders like the Orsini and the rest, is he?"

"Is he not?" demanded the Romagnol. "Does he not sleep in the same palace that shelters the duke himself? It is the house of Messer Bernardino of Parma. The finest in the city, of course. And there in the left hand range of rooms sleeps Tizzo in the chamber next to that of his father. My captain himself was called to Tizzo this evening, and talked with him there. I myself led his white horse into the stable in the next court. Only the duke himself is better lodged than Tizzo, if it comes to that."

AT the chief portal of the house of Messer Bernardino of Parma two lights burned and half a dozen soldiers stood on guard. Beatrice Baglione walked carelessly past them. She turned the corner, saw an unshuttered window and an empty street, and instantly was through the casement.

Inside there was the odor of a stable. The light came through the huge room only from a single lamp that hung from a beam near the farther door. The horses had not yet lain down. They were stamping, crunching their fodder, snorting out the dust of the hay.

Beatrice picked up a dung fork and walked calmly down the aisle between the stalls.

A voice bawled out at her: "Who goes there?"

"A dung fork," said she. "Do you want it?"

"Go to the devil with it," answered the groom.

She went outside the stable into the court and closed the door behind her. She could remember one figure in all that gloom—a form of dim silver in the fourth stall from the door. That was Falcone, a horse hardly less famous than Tizzo, his master, among the troops of the Borgian army. Perhaps the knowledge of his whereabouts would tell a tale later on in the night.

She stood now in a big court and looked up at the tiers of windows that framed the three sides of the open space.

The left wing contained the room in

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which Tizzo slept—with danger already creeping towards him from the Borgia; unless Lorenzo Ridi had lied. But dying men are not apt to lie. Tizzo, before the morning, would die unless the warning reached him.

How should she reach him?

Armed men patrolled the court. The torch light flickered pale over the big heads of the halberds as the men paraded. Their swords made a harsh shivering sound inside the scabbards.

A big tree offered her a ladder of a sort, as it grew at the end of the left wing of the building, the only hint of foliage in that mass of naked stone. She went quickly towards the tree and got behind the trunk of it as the soldiers turned their backs and went in the opposite direction along their beat.

They had to come back before she could venture to climb. Leaning close to the tree-trunk, she heard them humming to themselves.

One of them said: "Do we march on Ancona?"

The other answered: "Why should I care? Ancona has worse wine than this part of the world?"

"What fools the generals have been!" said the first sentry.

"Aye, fools!" said the other.

They turned at the end of their walk and proceeded back. They passed so close that she could have reached out and touched the shoulder of the nearest man. And when they were halfway down the court, she climbed the tree, managing to reach the first branch by a run and a jump.

The coarse bark bit into her hands. She smiled at that pain. Through the branches, she could see the soldiers turn and come towards her again. As they came under the tree one of them said: "Why should a tree rustle when there is no wind?"

"Because there's a cat in it, you fool!" said the second.

And they both laughed and went on.

CHAPTER VIII.

THE BURNING OF A CANDLE.

WHEN she got out as far as the branch would bear her weight and when it had already begun to crackle beneath her, she found that she could barely reach to the edge of the nearest casement with the tip of her toe and the ends of her fingers. She had to grit her teeth. When she looked down, the pavement of the court seemed harder than stone, and rough as teeth to receive her.

Then, with a shake of the head, she thought of Tizzo. How like a cat he would spring across this little gap. For her own part, she barely was able to summon enough resolution to make the attempt. She drew herself out. She felt his fingers slipping. She had a frantic impulse to fling herself back into the tree which she had just quitted; but the noise of that would certainly bring the soldiers—and the end of her attempt. So she held to her grip as grimly as she could and gradually drew herself forward until both feet were firmly planted in the casement.

The shutters were open. She stood looking down into a little room which was almost bare. There was only a small table in the center of it, and a bench on one side of the table. A pair of gloves lay on this table and a candle burned on it. The candle gleam was reflected from the boss of a shield that leaned in a corner of the room, with a long pike rising beside it.

She could see everything with perfect clearness. There was a cheese rind

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beside the gloves on the table, and a litter of crumbs of bread-crust. And on the floor there was a sleek, long tailed gray rat moving quickly here and there, no doubt picking up fallen crumbs.

Now it lifted its head. She could see the bright, long whiskers tremble back and forth as the horrible creature scented more food above its head.

But she could thank God for the rat. It was the sufficient warranty that there was no human being in the room, unless he were asleep in a corner bed.

She slipped down to the sill of the window and dropped to the floor beneath, turning her back and lowering herself with her hands, there was such a distance to the floor. Behind her she heard the light, tapping scurry of feet as the rat fled to its hole.

She had gained the floor when two powerful hands gripped her by the arms.

"So, my fine young thief!" said a man's voice.

She wrenched herself desperately. She merely succeeded in twisting around, so that he held her in the grasp of one strong arm. The other hand held over her head a deadly little poniard. The wine-breath, sour with an admixture of cheese, stifled her.

And then she saw over his scarred face the coming of a broad smile.

"A wench!" he said, "Ah, ha! All good things come to those who wait! Wine and bread and cheese—and then a wench!"

He jammed the poniard back into the scabbard and slipped his hands down her arms until he held her by the wrists. After that, he pushed her back to arm's length and looked her over from head to foot.

The cloak obscured his full sight of her. He held both her wrists easily in the grip of a single hand. With the other, he cast the cloak away from her shoulders.

"And so I thought—so I thought!" he said. "Even better than my thinking, and better than my dreaming."

He leaned and kissed her. She did not stir. She could feel the grease left by his lips on her skin. But she would show neither terror nor disgust. With a still face she regarded him.

"A brazen one for such a young one," said the soldier. "What's your name?"

"Giulia."

"Whose daughter?"

"Tomaso, the chief fisherman."

"He's as important as that?" grinned the soldier.

Where the scar cut across his upper lip, the mustaches scattered as he smiled and showed a broad, white glint of scar-tissue. He had no forehead at all—only two wrinkles of flesh above the eyebrows and then a shag of hair.

"And whom have you come to see?" asked the soldier.

She answered—she had planned that answer—"Tizzo."

"Ah hai! You aim at the high ones, eh?" said the soldier. "Tizzo, is it? Let me see. Does that sound reasonable? All the fine ladies throw their gloves to him. Why should he look down as far as a fisherman's daughter? I'll take you to the captain of the watch, perhaps—and he may have something to say, and certain ways of saying it. Or will you stay here comfortably with me?"

SHE said nothing. She kept watching that face, seeing it as she never had seen another thing in her life.

The moonlight streamed in across her shoulder and mixed with the dim yellow of the lamplight that illumined him. It seemed to her that the moon-

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light was like a stream of cold water, chilling her to the bone.

"Tizzo!" said the soldier. "And thinking about him has almost made you dumb, eh? Well, he's a good captain. By God, he's one of the best that rides a horse or swings an axe. I've see that axe of his chip a way through a forest of steel helmets. Tizzo, is it? And did you come for love or money?"

"He gave me the purse at my belt," she answered.

"Ah, did he?"

He took hold of the purse at her belt and wrenched it away. He stepped back from her, holding her with an occasionally watchful eye.

She could leap back into the casement, now, and so fling herself into the tree and escape—but that would not save Tizzo.

She had to steel herself with invincible calmness.

He poured the money on the table—a few coppers — much silver — some glintings of golden coins.

"What a fool he is! Gold! To throw away gold on a wench!"

He came back to her.

"Who are you?" he demanded.

"Giulia," she answered. "The daughter of Tomaso."

"You lie," said the soldier.

She answered nothing. It seemed to her that she could not endure for another moment the weight of his eyes; outwardly she maintained a thin shell of calm. Inside, she felt the scream working higher in her throat.

"Well . . ." he said.

He went back to the money on the table.

"If you've told me a lie, you've paid for it," he said. "You lost your purse —and you don't know where. Is that the story you would tell him?"

"Yes," she answered.

He doubted her with his eye for another moment, then he picked up her cloak and flung it to her.

"I can't turn my shoulder on fortune as good as this. Do you know where the room of Tizzo is?"

"Only that it's in this wing of the palace."

"Well, come along with me. What a night for me! I can go back to Switzerland, after one more profit like this. I can see the mountains again and listen to the cows booming in the valleys. Come along."

He led her from the room into a corridor and, keeping his grip on her arm, conducted her past several doors. At last he stopped and pointed.

"There you are," he said. "The thing is to see whether or not the brave captain has left his door unlocked for you. If he hasn't, I march you to the captain of the guard, money or no money. There may be some deviltry behind all this. A fisherman's daughter never had an eye as straight as yours!"

SHE bowed her head and tried the knob of the door. Incredibly, it turned and gave at once. The door pushed open and showed her a thin wavering of candlelight inside. A great breath came into her body. All the rest had been despair, but this was hope. Through the narrow gap of the opening door, she could see the central table, and the burning candle and, lying on a chair nearby, that famous axe with its head of the blue Damascus steel.

"He's waiting for you, then," whispered the soldier. "Good fortune!"

And he went off down the hall with long, silent strides, hunching his shoulders to take weight from his feet.

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Beatrice Baglione, pushing the door wide, looked anxiously around her.

Tizzo, fully clothed, had thrown himself on the bed in the corner of the room. He lay sprawling, his head turned down until it almost touched his shoulder. The candlelight touched dimly on the flaming red of his hair. And her heart leaped and raced away towards him.

A touch of terror was in her happiness until, as she closed the door behind her, distinctly she heard the sound of his breathing.

The moonlight was entering the two windows a white step. But the candle threw most of the dim light that invaded the room. It seemed to her that a thin, white mist issued from the candle and curled slightly upwards in the air, worked on by the draught that came in through the windows. But this mist, if there were one, was so extremely thin that it was hardly visible. It might have been a matter of thought only. But not a matter of thought was the faint fragrance which filled the air—something in the nature of the sweetness of violets—a clean delight of perfume.

She went towards the bed, passing into one of the dim billows of that mist. One breath, and she was staggered. A second and she fell to the floor.

She knew, then. Poison—Bonfadini the master devil of the craft! Men had died before, in the house of the Borgia, from as small a thing as inhaling the fragrance of a bouquet of roses.

She screamed loudly for help. Her throat muscles had strained, but not even a whisper came to her ears.

She could make no sound. It was as though she had tried to cry out while she swam under water.

There was a roaring in her ears. Darkness was rolling over her brain. She got to hands and knees which trembled under her, and crawled forward.

Her knees gave way.

She dragged herself on hands and elbows only. The rest of her body trailed like the body of a snail. Its weight was enormous. She wanted to drop her head and fall asleep. It was agony, it was death to maintain that struggle, but she saw before her the hand of Tizzo that drooped down over the side of the bed.

It was an infinite distance away. It was a distance that grew greater and greater, or was that because of the dimness of her eyes?

And then, suddenly, it was immediately before her. She caught at it with her last strength and fell senseless on her face.

CHAPTER IX.

THE PEARLS.

AT a little after nine in the evening, Bonfadini stepped close to Cesare Borgia and murmured at his ear: "I found him asleep. I changed the candle that was burning in his room for one of another sort. He will have sleep dreams, my lord. He will have dreams so delightful that he never will waken from them."

"Poor Tizzo," said the Borgia. "I tell you, Bonfadini, that I feel a stroke against my heart when I think that that axe of his never will strike at me again. And perhaps poison was too ignoble. He should have been openly arrested."

"He is too popular with the soldiers, my lord. We would have risked an open revolt if Tizzo had been led out

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to meet a gentleman's death under the edge of the executioner's sword."

"True again," said the Borgia. "When one sees how common soldiery and other fools follow brave and honest leaders, it is almost a temptation to change the rôle and become such a man myself."

"My lord chooses to amuse himself with speculation," said Bonfadini, dryly.

"What is your pay for this little job with Tizzo?" asked the Borgia.

"The pearls have been growing larger, my lord. As you see?"

The poisoner took out a string of pearls, held it by a central point, and allowed the jewels to fall away from the place where his fingers pinched the silk on which they were strung. Beginning with jewels quite small, they increased gradually in size on either side, mounting into big pearls towards the center of the necklace, which was left open for a gap of several inches.

"You've increased the length of the silk, Bonfadini," said the Borgia.

"My lord," said the poisoner, "that is because I trust that you will live a long and happy life."

"And that you will make it happier by removing my enemies one by one—a pearl for every life?" asked the Borgia, smiling.

"It has been so to this point," said Bonfadini, and held up the necklace with an admiring eye, half closed by pleasure.

"Do you want me to count them?" asked the Borgia, grimly.

"You may do so with pleasure, my lord. These on the left all have been added in memory of the good men and the lovely women who have been a little too much in my lord's way. They have inherited the heaven that was their due, and a little before their time. These on the right are the scoundrels who have gone to a hell that already was hungry for them."

The duke laughed dryly.

"I see you are a genius, Bonfadini," he said, "and you have a way of making even your poisonings acts of virtue."

"A wise man," said Bonfadini, "always knows how to compromise with his conscience. A conscience, my lord, is a treasure that never should be expended hastily or carelessly. Neither should pearls be cast before swine."

"I see that you've been profiting by the conversation of my Machiavelli," said the duke.

"A man, my lord, of the sheerest virtue."

Here the duke opened a purse and took from it several pearls, which he matched against those on the necklace, and finally, selecting one, he handed it to the poisoner. Bonfadini dropped to one knee to receive it.

"On which side do you place that jewel?" asked the Borgia.

Bonfadini, with rapid fingers, was unknotting the silken string and threading the last pearl. As he held up the unfinished necklace again he said: "A man whom I have hated, my lord, and yet the justice of the clear mind and the unprejudiced soul forces me to place him on the left. He is at this moment winging his way to the upper silences and blue of heaven, my lord."

The duke laughed again.

"You are one of the strings of my heart, Bonfadini," he said. "Without you, I should be nothing. But one Bonfadini and one Machiavelli are enough to ensure the fortune of any man. Have the officers gone to make the other arrests?"

"They have, my lord. As soon as I had lighted the candle in the room

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of Captain Tizzo, I went immediately to the officers and passed on your orders. I think—I think that they are coming now, my lord."

For a steady tramping of heavy feet came up the corridor and now paused at the door of the duke's chamber.

"See what it is, and let them in," commanded the Borgia.

HE reclined on his bed, pulling a big cushion behind him. There was a dish of Venetian sweetmeats on the bedside table, and one of these, after making careful selection, he placed in his mouth.

At that moment the door opened and the two Orsini were led in with their arms bound, and soldiers about them.

Paolo Orsini fell on his knees at once. "Oh, my lord, noble Cesare," he groaned, "you are not doing more than jest with us, I know."

"What a fool I would be to jest with the proclaimed king of Italy!" said the duke.

"Get on your feet," said the other Orsini. "It is worse than two deaths for me to see you on your knees to that inhuman devil."

Niccolò Machiavelli came unbidden into the room and observed the scene.

"You see, my dear Niccolò," said the duke, "that a man cannot do justice without being cursed—and that is one of the pities of this life of ours in Italy."

He added, with a sweep of the hand: "Take them out. I am tired of their faces. I always *have* been tired of the sight of them. Away with the Orsini. This will be sweet news for certain ears in Rome!"

And the Orsini were dragged from the room. Paolo began to groan as he was carried away. He began to pray aloud for the kind God to have mercy.

"They will not die here," said the duke to Machiavelli. "Not until they get to Rome. It would be a pity to waste the sweetness of their deaths on a place like Sinigaglia. But Rome will lick up their blood faster than it can pour from their wounds. Ah, here is my brave Oliverotto!"

The general came in with a firm step and a high head.

Cesare Borgia rose from his bed. "Are you ready?" he asked Oliverotto.

"Ready and more than ready, my lord," said the general. "I would despise living after I have made such a fool of myself as to trust your word."

The duke picked from the table a dagger with a delicately carved handle, ornamented and roughened with jewels, cut and uncut.

"How brave are you, my dear Oliverotto?" he asked.

"Brave enough to stand the rack," said the general.

"I think so and hope so," said the Borgia. "But I intend a mercy, my friend."

He laid the point of the dagger against the bare breast of the general and pressed, lightly.

The point sank in.

"If you draw a deep breath, you are a dead man, Oliverotto," said the duke.

His teeth and his eyes shone as he smiled at the face of his victim, but Oliverotto showed not the slightest emotion. His own glance sternly held on that of the Borgia. There was not a quiver of his lip.

The dagger point sank slowly into the living flesh above the heart.

"So much life, so bravely throbbing," said the duke. "It makes me think of a hidden bird that wants to break from the mesh and escape into the sky. You will fly faster than

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birds, Oliverotto, but not in the same direction."

"I give my soul to God," said Oliverotto, "if he will have it. Otherwise it is a first-rate prize for the devil."

AN instant later his head fell on his shoulder and his body would have dropped to the floor except for the hands that gripped him on either side. He was dead.

"An excellent fellow, that Oliverotto," said the Borgia. He picked up a napkin from the table and wiped the dagger clean on it. "Lay this dagger aside for me, Bonfadini," he said. "I never shall use it again after it has been dipped in such brave blood."

The dead body was carried away.

"How little blood was spilled!" said the Borgia. "I think that this might be a lesson to executioners, Machiavelli."

"It is always ennobling," said the Florentine, "to see a brave man die as he should."

"You lick your lips, Niccolò," answered the duke. "You would be glad to have a hand in this sort of a business?"

"Not at all," said Machiavelli. "I play the rôle of an observer. I do not attempt to rival my masters."

And before another word could be said Vitellozzo Vitelli was brought in, struggling with his guards, still half-drunk, cursing. When he saw the Borgia, he made a mighty bound and almost reached him before the guards drew him back. The Borgia, as though half in self-defense, gripped him by the collar of the shirt and then twisted the cloth.

The mouth of Vitellozzo gaped and his tongue thrust out under the strangling pressure.

"What do you say to me," asked the duke through his teeth. He stood up on his toes as he applied more pressure. The collar of the shirt pinched into the fleshy neck of Vitellozzo. "Have you no answers? Where are your curses? Where is your ranting? Where are your damned speeches? Talk to me now, Vitellozzo! Speak one word, even, and I grant you your life and your liberty, I enrich you and set you free. Speak to me, Vitellozzo! Oh God, that I could have this pleasure every day of my life and see the faces of my enemies blackened and their eyes thrusting out! Look at him, Machiavelli!"

"It is a pity," said the Florentine, "that one of my friends in Florence could not see this mask and make a living sketch of it. Note how the tongue quivers, my lord!"

The legs of Vitellozzo jumped up and down rapidly. His body writhed. And then he hung limp as dead flesh in the hands of the soldiers.

They, with white faces of horror, looked down on the dead man their master had just put to death.

The Borgia, stepping back, looked down at his hand. It was white from the immense pressure it had just exerted.

"Send the soldiers out with the carrion, Bonfadini," he commanded. "And then look in on Tizzo and see how well he sleeps now. This is one of the pleasant nights of my life."

CHAPTER X.

BONFADINI AGAIN.

CAPTAIN TIZZO had dreamed of a garden in the early spring with a delicate fragrance of violets in the air. And yet that fragrance made

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him so uneasy that he began to smile in his sleep; and at that moment he felt a faint clutch at his hand.

He was awake and on his feet, instantly.

Between him and the moonlight, he saw a faint swirling of the thinnest white mist, billowing dimly up towards the ceiling, as the pressure of the wind whirled it. And on the floor at his feet he saw Beatrice, her eyes closed.

At the same time, a breath of deadly sickness entered his lungs and staggered his brain.

He dropped to his knees.

The air was pure, closer to the floor. He could breathe again safely. And as he laid his hand over the heart of the girl, he felt the slow, faint beating of it. Then, wildly rolling his eyes, he marked the flutter of the candle flame. Out of that flame seemed to issue the delicate mist, the fragrance of the violets—and suddenly he remembered another moment when such a perfume had been in the air.

Holding his breath, he crossed the room and pinched out the flame of the candle. Still without drawing breath, he rushed back to the girl, caught up her body, and ran with the limp weight of it to the first of the open casements.

Above his head, thin, thin wisps of the vapor continued to float out into the moonlight, but here at the lower casement the air was fresh. He knew that a miracle and the coming of the girl had saved him.

Her head lay lifelessly in the hollow of his arm. Her lips were parted a little. They seemed purple gray in the moonlight. When he leaned and put his face close, he could not feel her breathing.

The boy's clothes on her slender body were a desecration. And how had she reached him through the streets of Sinigaglia, crowded with the men of the duke? How could she have come near to him through a thousand dangers? How had Giovanpaolo happened to let her go?

Well, it would have been easier to keep a bird in one place in the sky than to control her once her heart was up and her mind resolved. He held her less hungrily to his breast. For it seemed to him that the pressure might keep her heart from beating.

There was still a gentle and steady throbbing. Was it growing stronger? Was it diminishing?

He began to pray. All he could say was: "God see me—God forgive me—God have mercy on me!"

He was praying for himself, but he knew that the prayer was for Beatrice.

It seemed to him that the ghost of the white hands of Bonfadini were pressed on the throat of the girl, trying to press down the small fountain of life that began to lift and throb there little by little.

Then, guardedly, he turned his head towards the next casement, leaning far out.

He whistled, waited, whistled again. His father was in that room, unless the devilish practices of Bonfadini had rubbed him effectually out of the reckoning of life.

And then a burly pair of shoulders, a tousled head appeared at the next casement.

"It is I!" said Tizzo. "Dress and arm yourself quickly. The devil is afoot—murder in the air—get from the palace the quickest way and go to my company of Romagnols. Please be quick. I cannot join you. I must stay here with Beatrice—"

"Beatrice?" gasped the older soldier.

"She is here. Half-dead through one of Bonfadini's gestures. You

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know his art. Go quickly. Rouse them, they'll come. And with them, I may manage to fight my way out—"

The head of the baron of Melrose disappeared. From the next room came soft sounds of padding feet, light clinking noises of steel against steel.

These noises ended with the sound of a closing door.

But would the baron succeed in passing through the corridors of the palace unchallenged? Was it a madness on the part of the Borgia that the life of the father had not been attempted at the same time as that of the son?

HE forgot these thoughts, and looked down again at the girl. When he kissed her, it seemed to him that the ghost of a smile began on her lips.

Or was it the smile of death?

He touched her breast. There was no pulsation of the heart. With a groan of mortal anguish, he dropped to his knees. He pressed his ear against her breast.

Was it her own heart that he heard beating or the thunder of galloping terror in his breast?

He began to whisper: "Mercy, God! Mercy!"

And it seemed to him that the icy fingers of the poisoner were closing over his own temples, over his own throat, stifling the breath.

That was the moment when he heard a light footfall in the corridor and, after that, a slight moaning sound as the handle of the door was turned.

He laid the weight of Beatrice on the floor. There was still warmth in her flesh, and yet it seemed to him that there was less warmth than he could have thought necessary to life. The touch of the stone was on the back of his fingers. The touch of her body was on the front of them. Putting her down, like this, was to Tizzo like abandoning her, dropping her out of consciousness, out of existence.

He leaped towards his bed and found his sword beside it. He was crouched there as the door swung slowly open. At first he could see nothing, hear nothing, until at length he was aware of a slight whispering noise, and after that, a lean body looming, a body with skinny legs that stepped half into the moonlight as though into a bath of silvery water. And above, the body was clothed in a doublet.

"Strange!" murmured the voice of Bonfadini. "Strange! Very strange!"

Tizzo leaped at the sound rather than at the sight of the detestable monster. His sword point found a bone in the body of the man, glanced from it, sank through a softness of flesh.

He saw a glitter of light in the hand of Bonfadini. He reached with his left hand and caught the wrist of the striking hand. The blade of the dagger went over his shoulder and the arm struck with force. He had a glimpse of the contorted face of the man, and then Bonfadini was away.

He had struck to kill before he leaped off the death that was working in his body; and he left Tizzo with a warmth of blood running down from his sword blade over his hand.

The man was almost at the door before Tizzo realized what had happened. Bonfadini must not escape from the room. He must die there, inside the room.

Strange that the poisoner made no outcry. Not a sound had passed his lips, though his agony must have been mortal. Tizzo raced for him, saw the door opened, slammed. He gripped the edge of it with his hand before it had a chance to shut. He thrust the

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door wide again and saw before him, in the dim light of the hall lantern, the form of the poisoner running fast, but swaying heavily from side to side.

He could not run far, in that condition. As he dipped out of sight around the corner of the hallway, Tizzo was racing after him at full speed.

AND it was then that he heard—from an infinite distance, welling up into his mind like a fish rising through dark waters—the outcry of a voice that pronounced his name.

"Tizzo! Tizzo!" a feeble cry.

But that was Beatrice.

If she were alive now, then she would not die at all, if once he could get her away from that place.

But the first step to that was to overtake Bonfadini and strike him down before he had raised the alarm.

Still strange, very strange, that he had made no outcry. The place must be filled with men-at-arms and lesser soldiery ready to answer a summons, but Bonfadini had fled as though he were in the desert and only could save his life by the speed of his heels.

Fast as a greyhound, Tizzo turned the corner of the hall, and there saw Bonfadini rushing before him through an open, lighted doorway. Tizzo followed with a bound. Before him appeared the lofty height of Cesare Borgia, with Niccolò Machiavelli not far away.

CHAPTER XI.

ONE MAN'S POLICY.

THERE was a long sword lying across the foot of the bed of the Borgia, encased in its sheath. This the duke whipped out, the motion causing the blade to scream softly against the metal scabbard. At his feet fell Bonfadini and threw his arms around the legs of his masters. He was bleeding horribly. The great red stain sprang out on either side. He was writhing his legs together in the death agony.

Niccolò Machiavelli drew a short sword that was hanging at his side and stood on guard without taking a step forward.

"Ah!" said the duke. "Tizzo—and a short shrift for him! This for you, dog! This, and this!"

With each gasp of his breast he struck heavily with the full length of the blade, reaching; master strokes which in the bullfight had shorn the head clean from a fierce, wild bull.

They would have cloven Tizzo in twain if they had reached him, but he avoided those strokes with swift flexions of the body. His own light sword-point reached for the throat of the duke and made him spring back.

"Niccolò, come in on his back!" gasped the Borgia.

"I am a man of words, not of action," said the great statesman. "I cannot use my sword except to save my life."

"I'm murdered!" breathed the Borgia. "Help! Help!"

For Tizzo, dipping under the full sway of a mighty stroke, leaped in. He had had to use his sword blade to parry the blow. The hilt was nearest the target. Therefore he struck with the hilt, and the metal landed full between the masked eyes of the duke. He dropped to one knee. His sword, with a long, shivering sound, fell to the floor.

And Tizzo, measuring the distance of Machiavelli with a glance, drew back his weapon for the final thrust.

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And then he heard a rain of footfalls in the corridor.

"Back with them!" said Tizzo. "Send them back."

The shiver and the clatter of armor could be too plainly heard. He had the life of the Borgia under the edge of his sword, but that meant his own life, the life of Beatrice lost also.

The duke, half-stunned, looked wildly up at Tizzo, made a brief gesture of surrender, and then shouted: "Get out from the hall! What do you mean by maundering through the palace at this hour? Out!"

The footfalls stopped. The metal of armored feet screeched on the stone of the pavement.

"Pardon, my lord!" called a voice. "We thought we heard a cry for help—"

"Out! Out!" thundered the duke.

The footfalls hastily, noisily retreated.

Cesare Borgia slowly rose to his feet. His sword lay on the floor. He had no weapon now, except the dagger on the table beside him, and Tizzo backed him into a corner of the room.

"Hush!" said the duke. "Bonfadini is speaking. You have killed him, Tizzo, and I feel that you've killed my soul with him. Alessandro! Alessandro! Do you hear me? Can you speak?"

The gasping voice of the poisoner answered: "Oh, master, I am going to hell such a long time before you."

"Every day of my life I shall remember you!" groaned the duke. "Did this cursed devil of a Tizzo murder you?"

"As I went to look at his dead body, it leaped at me from beside his bed. For once, master, I have failed," gasped Bonfadini. "Misery—how my heart burns! . . . My pearls . . . my uncompleted necklace . . . my love . . . ah, Borgia . . ."

The last bubbling gasp gave inexpressible proof that he had died.

Cesare Borgia leaned a hand against the corner of the wall and muttered slowly: "He is gone—Bonfadini . . . I never dreamed that sword could penetrate that devil's body . . . but he is gone and I think that I'm gone with him. . . . Machiavelli, how was it that you would not strike a stroke in my behalf?"

"My lord," said the Florentine, calmly, "to admire murder from a distance when there are reasons to enforce it is philosophy and good political thinking. But to assist at murder is a crime. If a thousand Borgias, steeped in crime, were threatened by a Tizzo, still it would be a crime to help the Borgias against him."

"This is your praise and your almost worship of me?" demanded the Borgia.

"MY lord," said Machiavelli, "I admired you to the limit of mortal power while you were still victorious and always successful. This morning and evening you were a most politic murderer. Now you are a most damnable villain. That is the penalty of every bad man who fails. My lord, I bid you farewell."

And Niccolò Machiavelli passed out from the room.

The duke nodded his head. "Bonfadini is gone, and Machiavelli is gone. At one stroke I lose the right hand of my body and the right hand of my wits. And through you, Tizzo! God mark the day in black when I first laid eyes on you! Who are those swarming and making noise in the courtyard?"

"Look for yourself, my lord. I am not fool enough to turn my back to you and your murders."

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The duke turned to the window, muttering: "Bonfadini dead! And that keen Machiavelli leaving me with a curse of impotence. Am I at the end of my tether? No, by heaven! Those are my own men! Those are my own Romagnols! And still the place is in my hands!"

"They are the Romagnols of my own company," said Tizzo. "If you doubt it, call down to them. Call the name of my father."

"Good Bonfadini accounted for him long ago. He is dead, Tizzo," said the duke.

"Call his name, nevertheless," said Tizzo.

"Melrose!" called the duke.

And the deep, hearty voice of the baron rose in answer.

The duke staggered a little. He turned slowly back towards Tizzo.

"What sort of damned black magic have you used, Tizzo?" he said. "But still you never can escape from me. My voice can bring a thousand armed men."

"True," said Tizzo. "I never could escape—but they would find you dead. Policy, my lord, policy! That was always your word and the word of Machiavelli whom you admired so much. Policy, my lord, dictates that you should save your life even if the cost spoils some of the charms of your vanity. Tell my father to lead some of my men to my room and take the Lady Beatrice from it. She is ill — for a reason that you may guess after breathing the poisoned air."

Cesare Borgia hesitated a moment, and then leaned from the casement to speak.

It seemed always to Tizzo a miracle that he and his company of the stout Romagnol peasants managed to escape from the town. For, after they marched away from the palace, with the white horse of Tizzo dancing in their midst and Beatrice supported by strong hands as she reeled in the saddle, the duke could have had fifty times their number to crush them.

Tizzo could not know that the great duke sat, at that time, crossed legged on the floor, holding the thin, cold, white hand of Bonfadini, the poisoner. And even thoughts of vengeance, which always had been the nearest and the dearest to the duke's heart, were for the moment forgotten.

THE END

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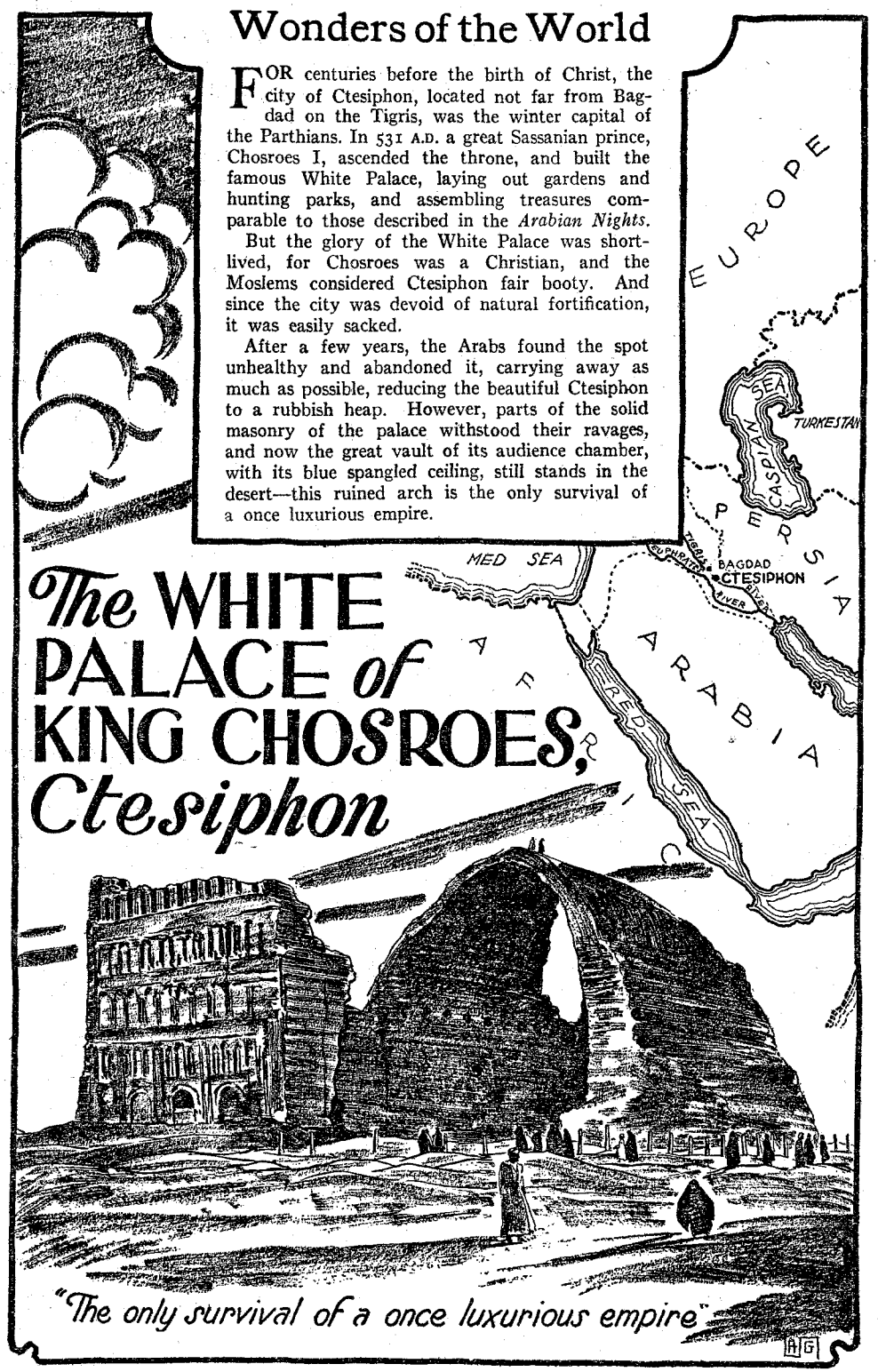
Wonders of the World

FOR centuries before the birth of Christ, the city of Ctesiphon, located not far from Bagdad on the Tigris, was the winter capital of the Parthians. In 531 A.D. a great Sassanian prince, Chosroes I, ascended the throne, and built the famous White Palace, laying out gardens and hunting parks, and assembling treasures comparable to those described in the *Arabian Nights*.

But the glory of the White Palace was short-lived, for Chosroes was a Christian, and the Moslems considered Ctesiphon fair booty. And since the city was devoid of natural fortification, it was easily sacked.

After a few years, the Arabs found the spot unhealthy and abandoned it, carrying away as much as possible, reducing the beautiful Ctesiphon to a rubbish heap. However, parts of the solid masonry of the palace withstood their ravages, and now the great vault of its audience chamber, with its blue spangled ceiling, still stands in the desert—this ruined arch is the only survival of a once luxurious empire.



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A forest fire trapped two cougar kittens; the mother could save only one—and from that drama a Northwest logger got an inspiration!

The fire was always just behind Donovan

Silver Thaw

By
FRANK RICHARDSON PIERCE
Author of "Shoestring Logger," "Picture Rock," etc.

CHAPTER I.

RED BLIZZARD.

DURING the gray hours before dawn, when humidity is highest, the great fire sweeping through the forest had appreciably slackened. But now, aided by the blazing morning sun it rushed on with renewed force—a red blizzard covering everything with livid embers. If it jumped the Salmon River, then nothing short of the Straits of Juan de Fuca could stop it.

Gray ash fell steadily over the Puget Sound country and on ships far at sea—ash from green, standing timber that had taken Nature hundreds of years to grow.

"Cyclone" Dan Donovan was not thinking of this as he raced ahead of

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the flames. He was thinking it had developed into a "crown" fire and that his chances of escape were one in a thousand. The fire did not run through the tree tops—it rolled! Sheets of solid flame leaped like waves a hundred feet high, then fell forward to ignite tops already dried by the terrible heat.

The tops fairly exploded. Again the flaming waves would form and rush on, faster than a man could run. The land and trees shuddered, like buildings from a passing train; the roar was deafening.

Cyclone Donovan was the strongest man in the logging country, but he knew he was tiring. There was a tremendous reserve strength packed in his two hundred and twenty pound body. He stood five feet nine inches, with a thick, short neck which drew his head close to his deep, wide shoulders.

The rain stained hat he wore was smouldering in a half dozen places; red embers were burning through his flannel shirt and blistering the hot flesh beneath. He swore and slapped out the sparks, growling like an angry bear. The sparks at most were annoying. The heat he drew into his sobbing lungs was a different matter.

Cyclone Donovan knew he could not stand much of it. His throat was dry; nostrils stung, but the lining of his lungs was burning with sudden fever. Each breath increased the torture. A bewildered blue grouse flew overhead; a cow elk rushed ahead of him and fell. She tried to regain her feet, only to fall once more. She bellowed with fright, then collapsed.

Donovan skirted her and spurted ahead, striving to gain a few precious yards on the red blizzard. A bull elk crashed through a thicket and struck a tree. He tumbled back, half of his antlers sheared cleanly off. Donovan could see the erratic pounding of the bull's heart against its ribs. It seemed as if the organ might burst any moment. The bull staggered to its feet and gazed about with bloodshot eyes. Its back was shot with black spots where embers had burned the hair. Suddenly it caught the scent of water and plunged on.

Donovan followed. A trail of sorts, beaten by pads and hoofs, appeared. Donovan's calks cut into it—the first white man to step on it; and he knew, also, he would be the last.

A SLEEK cougar bounded from a ledge twenty yards ahead of Donovan. Her powerful muscles rippled beautifully under her tawny coat as they drove her lithe body ahead. In a few seconds she disappeared into the smoke haze, but the brief glimpse Donovan had revealed a kitten in her mouth.

She returned. Her eyes were set on some point near the flames. She hardly saw the man, merely bounded into the brush, then back onto the trail as he stumbled past.

"You're done for, old girl!" Donovan thought.

His legs were like lead, now, and his chest was rasped by horrible fits of coughing. But he never let up. The flames were always just behind; the showering sparks always just ahead; the brush on either side always bursting into new blazes.

Suddenly he stumbled down hill, the timber cleared and the Salmon River flowed at his feet. Donovan hurled himself into the water. The surface was covered with ash and charcoal, but the water was cold. He rolled over several times, then, placing his feet with care, forded the stream.

On the opposite bank he collapsed.

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If the fire jumped the river, he knew there wasn't strength enough left in his body to get up and go on. He didn't particularly care just then. Gradually his heart-beat returned to something approaching normal; the pain in his lungs lessened.

The click of calked boots against loose stones aroused Donovan. He turned his head and saw a lanky individual stumbling towards him. In his right hand the man carried a whisky jug; in his left, a Bible. His bearing was that of the Kentucky mountaineer; there was a drawl in his voice, but little of the mountain country in his phrasing as he said, "I had an idea, Cyclone, you'd get singed. Tried to save your timber with a backfire, didn't you?"

"Yes," Donovan answered. "And I think I saved my wife's fir stand along the Skookum River. But at that there's some mighty fine stuff going up in smoke today."

"And one of the finest stills in the Puget Sound country," the mountaineer added. "A new one I'd just got in operation."

For the first time that morning Donovan smiled. In that smile one forgot the grimness of his rugged fighting face, and the rebelliousness in his thick, rusty hair. Instead there was the blue of Irish lakes and the clear, brilliant sunshine of Ireland in his humorous eyes. This man, known in the logging country as Kentucky Logan, had experienced no end of trouble with his stills. The Federal authorities had a habit of finding them. He manufactured good moonshine for himself and friends—never for the market. And with the righteous resentment of the true mountaineer he could not understand why the government should interfere.

Kentucky read the Bible a lot, often eying the still between profound passages of the Scriptures. On occasion he preached in the local churches, when the pastors were away, or ill. He was tolerant of the shortcomings of mankind, and thus he was universally popular.

Cyclone Donovan was greatly admired by Kentucky, partly because of the stark primitiveness of the man, but mostly because of his fighting qualities. With his bride, Dan Donovan had come into the Puget Sound country and taken up a timber claim. He bought others, and when his wife inherited money, he bought more, and built a small saw mill at Mill City.

All this had caused Kentucky no little concern. He knew from personal observation that certain "timber wolves" were letting Donovan go ahead. He was buying tracts they could not touch at any price because of the sheer hate of the owners. In due time the wolves prepared to clip the wool from the lamb which presumed to engage in the logging business in their midst.

To Kentucky's delight and the Puget Sound country's astonishment, the lamb let out never a bleat when attacked. He fought back and the wolves retired to nurse grievous wounds and prepare to renew the fight.

The swiftness with which Dan Donovan logged some of his tracts to supply money during the fight won him the name Cyclone. In a country where nicknames are bestowed through sheer merit this was an houor.

"I SURE hope you saved your wife's timber," Kentucky observed.

"You feel about it the way I feel about this here Bible. It's been in the family nearly a hundred years. This

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whisky jug's been in the family eighty years. I thought as long as I was saving it I might as well bring her out full. Have a shot?"

"I don't mind if I do," Cyclone answered.

In the midst of drinking he paused and stared. "Look over there, Kentucky, at that cougar. Damned if she hasn't got a problem on her hands." Cyclone pointed, and Kentucky noticed the hard, primitive glitter in his eyes. He had an idea the spell of the fire was still on the man. He had seen only the strongest emerge from the flaming forest—the bull elk, a mighty bear and the cougar. And he realized he was among the select group of the strong. Hundreds, possibly thousands, of weaker creatures—including other men—had perished.

The flames had reached the edge of the Salmon River and a wind coming down the canyon was carrying the sparks away from the green timber on the opposite shore. The cougar turned and snarled at the fire, then looked at two kittens she had brought to the other bank.

"She can't take 'em both, and she's got to make a choice!" Cyclone exclaimed. "She sure is facing a tough situation. But . . . it's life!"

Nervously she shifted from one kitten to the other. One whimpered with fear, but the other turned, snarling at the flames. "Game little devil!" Cyclone exploded. "Fightin' right back! Man! Man! There's courage. The other's a weakling and it wouldn't be there if its mother hadn't packed it."

A hush fell on the two men. They watched. Suddenly the cougar made her choice. She lifted a kitten in her teeth and plunged into the stream. She swam steadily, head high, the kitten almost clear of the water. She crawled to the bank a few yards from where the men watched. She dropped the kitten, shook herself and looked back. The flames had already swept over the spot where she had left her other kitten. She picked up her furry burden and bounded into the green timber, vanishing with the swift silence of blowing thistledown.

CYCLONE DONOVAN was silent a long time. His eyes were centered on the spot where the cougar had abandoned the kitten. "You know, Kentucky," he said at length, "I've just figured out that cat. There's a lesson in it for me. I've got two boys at home, Tim three years old, and Bud two . . ."

"Hell's bells, Cyclone!" Kentucky interrupted. "You ain't thinking of choosing between your two sons! You're human beings, you and your sons, not wild animals."

"Life is dog eat dog, whether you're human or animal," Cyclone insisted. "How much mercy have these human timber wolves on me? Just as much as the flames on that cat! As long as I'm strong and can't be knocked off my feet I've a chance. The minute I go down, they'll jump me."

"You've never been knocked off your feet in a fight," Kentucky observed, "and you've taken on some of the best. When loggers fight, either over timber or in a saloon free-for-all, it's a dirty fight."

"Some day I'll be knocked down, and then . . . I'm going home, Kentucky," Cyclone continued, "and I'm going to rough up those two sons of mine. I'm going to find out which snarls back, and which whimpers, then I'm going to make my choice. The son I choose will take my place when the time comes."

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"You might make the wrong choice," Kentucky argued.

"The cougar didn't," Cyclone answered. "Twenty years from now there'll be more timber wolves than ever before. Do you know what my wife's stand along the Skookum River will be worth? A million dollars! My own stuff will run close to that. It's going to take a man, a regular wolf of a man, to hold it."

Kentucky took a swig from the jug and stared at the fire. Cyclone had already forgotten his race with the flames; he had forgotten even his burning lungs and blistered shoulders. Only the influence of that cougar's choice remained, and he was thinking twenty years ahead when he, a wealthier Cyclone Donovan, would be facing financially stronger enemies.

Kentucky wiped his mouth on the back of his hand and asked:

"Will this son's name be Tim or Bud Donovan?"

"I won't know until I've made my choice," Cyclone answered, "but I'll nickname him Wolf." And there was significance in his hoarse voice.

CHAPTER II.

CYCLONE DONOVAN'S CHOICE.

CYCLONE DONOVAN'S weary legs carried him down a skidroad to a small stand of cedar. Ash fell steadily, and a haze almost obscured the timber, but a dozen men—his logging crew—were at work. A donkey engine dragged cedar logs from a black swamp—dragged them over the ground by sheer, brute strength. Each log cut a trench in the ground, tearing out roots and small trees in its path. The steel wire scraped living trees and cut grooves in the bark; the donkey engine spouted steam and sparks while the fireman stuffed strips of yellow pitchwood into the glowing fire box.

The log stopped on a platform where buckers cut it into shingle bolt length and dumped it into the creek.

In due time the bolts would arrive in the Donovan mill pond in Mill City.

Cyclone called this Camp One. Some day there would be a Camp Fifteen or Twenty, he hoped. He trudged on to a four room, frame building sitting in the clearing. Washing flapped in the breeze; two small boys were playing, while an anxious woman paced the floor.

"Oh, Dan!" she exclaimed as he came through the gate. "I was afraid . . . afraid . . ." She did not finish, but glanced at the smoke and sullen red streak in the sky.

"I think I saved your timber," he said. "Started a back-fire and had quite a tough time of it. A lot of number one stuff is going up in smoke. No end of game caught, too. The heat dried up the tules around Mallard Lake, then burned them down to the water. There isn't a duck on the lake. Nesting time, too."

"Have you seen Kentucky Logan?"

"Yes. He got out. Brought his Bible and jug with him. Lost his cabin and still," Cyclone answered. "Well, run along and get me something to eat; not much."

As she disappeared he got down on his knees and began playing with the two boys. It was quiet play at first, but it got rougher. Several times the boys looked up in wonder. This father who played with them nightly had suddenly changed. His face had lost its smile, he seemed to be staring through them at something beyond. Tim, the three-year-old, looked towards the timber won-

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dering what his father saw. But there was nothing except the somber trees and gray haze from the fire.

The play grew rougher. One of the boys started to whimper, then he flared up. He picked up a rock and hurled it at his father's head. The rock opened a small gash and the blood trickled in a tiny stream down Cyclone's forehead. It washed a crimson path through the coating of ash and grime that had formed on his sweaty face.

Cyclone laughed in the startled child's face.

Mrs. Donovan ran to the door. "Dan!" she sharply demanded. "What *are* you doing to those boys?"

Donovan turned to his wife. "Today, Mary, something happened. It opened my eyes and made me realize that I must train one of the boys to follow in my footsteps, and that the training must begin at once. I've just experimented a little and sorta tested their characters. I've made my choice."

"Oh, Dan!" the woman exclaimed. "That is wrong! It isn't fair to favor one and forget the other. You are making a mistake. Suppose when they are grown you learn you have trained the weakling—if there be one—and have neglected the boy with the fighting instincts."

"Character doesn't change," he stubbornly insisted. "It's there or it isn't. If there it must be developed and made stronger. I haven't made any mistake." He stared reflectively at the burning forest. "Twenty or thirty years from now you'll realize I'm right."

"Jacques Gaspard was here today," Mary Donovan said. "I told him our timber isn't for sale at any price. He said he would be back this evening."

"I'm thinking of Jacques Gaspard and others of his breed when I plan *now* to defend Donovan timber from attacks twenty years from now," he answered.

IT was evening when Gaspard arrived. The direct gaze of his black eyes deceived many. His voice was soft, inviting confidence. He was physically powerful and possessed an intelligent head, but his manner was as smooth as oil. Dan Donovan instinctively mistrusted him. It was a primitive distrust and as definite as the scent of a passing cougar is to a bull elk.

"You suffered losses today, my friend, no?" Gaspard asked.

"None except sore lungs and a few shoulder burns," Donovan answered. "And I started a backfire that saved a hundred acres of your timber along with Mrs. Donovan's stand."

"Exactly. Now if you and Mrs. Donovan will sell out to me, my tract will be complete, no?" Gaspard said.

"And put you in a position to sandbag a half dozen old-timers who aren't ready to sell out their timber claims yet," Donovan bluntly suggested. "We may as well have a showdown, Gaspard. We know the reason you left the Canadian woods and came to Puget Sound is because the authorities were building up a timber stealing case against you; and that your own folks paid you well to get out of their logging outfit. A leopard doesn't change his spots."

"Perhaps I have realized my mistake and am trying to begin anew, no?" Gaspard suggested. "A partnership with your experience and my money would go far."

"I'm afraid I couldn't keep up with you," Donovan answered. He followed his guest to the door, more than ever convinced of the importance of preparing for the future. Gaspard was ambitious and dreamed in terms of

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empires. Nothing less than timber from snowline to tidewater would suit him.

Most Olympic Peninsula streams are too fast and rocky for driving logs to tidewater. Loggers think in terms of railroads and sheltered bays where the logs can be either floated to a convenient mill or towed in rafts to Puget Sound plants. Gaspard was smart enough to realize Donovan's Canoe Bay was the key to large scale operations in that timbered area bordering the Straits of Juan de Fuca.

Gaspard stared briefly at the powerful Irishman, then shrugged his shoulders. "If it's war you want, then war it shall be," he said.

Cyclone Donovan watched Gaspard swing down the skidroad. His stride was tigerish and confident, but not quite as confident as Donovan's grin. "I'm good for a lot of fights," he chuckled. "And when I begin to stiffen up 'Wolf' Donovan will be ready to step into the old man's shoes." It was night now and the glare of the fire lighted the smoking heavens. Eerie shadows slanted across the clearings. "But if Nature is as rough as this every year," he reflected, "there won't be any timber left to fight for."

Cyclone Donovan was an Irish logger, not a prophet. He could not know it would be twenty years before the forces of Nature again struck at the great forest and shaped the destiny of the Donovan sons, and their old man, Cyclone Dan.

CHAPTER III.

SILVER THAW.

TIM DONOVAN ran through the forest with the same driving strength his father had displayed on the day of the great fire. About him was a world of ice. The ground under foot was coated with it, the tree tops carried tons of it in their lofty tops and the roaring gale was bowling them over like ten-pins.

Bursts of white vapor came from his sobbing lungs and his two hundred pound body, toughened by hard work, was beginning to weaken. His chances of gaining a clearing behind reach of the falling trees was one in a thousand. Deep in the ground he heard the sharp crack of a breaking tap root. A two hundred foot fir thundered to the ground, carrying the splintered remnants of a half dozen smaller trees with it.

"Plenty of good timber being shattered today," he thought. "No soft, forest floor rot to cushion the shock. The ground's frozen solid."

A scream came in the lull following the crash of the falling tree. "Cougar!" he panted, pausing to listen. "No, that's a woman's scream." They are like, but an experienced woodsman can tell the difference. It came again and sent a chill through Tim's hot blood. "She's to the southeast," he growled. "And a hell of a chance I've got finding her."

He bent his six foot, three inch body to the blast and scowled with slitted eyes. The icy brim of his hat pressed down hard on his rusty hair. He was Dan Donovan's son all right. Anyone would catch the resemblance at a glance.

But he was taller and leaner. And his blue eyes carried a smouldering flame of resentment Dan's had never known.

The scream came again and he dug his sharp calks into the icy ground and pressed ahead. A tree fell in front of him and he crawled over its icy trunk, dropped to the ground, and then

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climbed over five fallen trees in a tangled mass.

"Thousands of trees," he panted, "thousands down! My trees! All I've got in the world. For once the Old Man's got to quit favoring Bud and give me a fair deal." He struggled up a ridge and saw an acre of timber laid flat. "This stuff's got to be logged this summer. Old Man's got to help me. Where's that woman?"

If he wasn't so nearly exhausted his thoughts would be clearer, he knew. Everything was a jumble of down timber, the need of his father's aid, and a woman who had intruded herself just when he required every ounce of strength to gain a safe spot.

TIM crawled to a tree-trunk, dug in his calks and studied the country below him. Rain came in flurries, mixed with wet snow. It froze wherever it stuck. He saw no girl, but his experienced eyes detected a cougar's tawny coat. The cat was crouched, its tail lashing, its powerful body tensing for a spring. Tim flung his thirty-thirty rifle to his shoulder and aimed at a point which would break down the cat's shoulders. His fingers crooked about the trigger, then hesitated.

He saw more than a gigantic, superbly furred cat. He saw a scar on the cat's back. It was shaped like the forks of a trail—a heavy scar, then two narrow scars branching from it. A falling ember during a heavy forest fire would make such a scar.

An odd expression came to Tim Donovan's face. He shifted the rifle a fraction and fired. Shattered ice spurted over the cat, and it vanished like a puff of vapor. Tim ran to the spot and looked down on a slim girl pinned to the ground by a tree. He caught a swift picture of stormy black eyes gleaming from a white, pain-tortured face; of round breasts pressing hard against a flannel shirt with each quick breath; of a pounding pulse in her white throat.

The last time he had looked into this girl's eyes she was sighting a rifle on his heart and ordering him off forbidden timber land.

They were enemies before they were born, and in the unwritten mountaineer code they never could be other than enemies. The border between the Donovan and Overton timber holdings was as sharply defined and as jealously guarded as any in Europe. Nor had years in the same school brought Tim Donovan and Ruth Overton any closer.

"Is your leg broken, Ruth?" he asked.

"I don't know," she answered. "A sudden squall knocked over a half dozen trees at once. I dodged five, but the sixth caught me. There's no sensation whatever in my leg. I yelled for help and old Phantom, the cougar, came. He was about to spring and then you came. . . . But why did you miss? You're a dead shot, Tim."

"It's a long story," he answered. "I knew the shattered ice would drive him off."

"A long story. And it has something to do with your father—the old devil—favoring Bud over you, I'll wager." Her eyes grew hard a moment, then lifted to the four-foot trunk less than twenty feet away. Each gust bent the top with its ice-bound boughs towards her. The coating on the trunk cracked and dropped in shattered strips and deep in the ground the roots began to snap.

"When that tree falls it's the end of Ruth Overton," the girl said with fatalistic calm. "The end won't be so hard,

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knowing the same storm ruined Tim Donovan," she added.

HE was watching the tree, hoping the wind would slacken and give him time to cut away the frozen ground and free the girl. He made no answer. A man can't argue with a girl facing death, and perhaps the sharp words falling from her tongue helped her to endure the suspense.

More ice fell and she said, "And old Cyclone won't help you. Bud's timber is down, too. Bud's the favorite and all the Donovan equipment will go to salvaging his timber."

"A silver thaw plays no favorites," he said. "Overton timber's going down, too."

"It was doomed anyway, thanks to the Donovans," she retorted. "No one wants over-ripe timber. And that's what ours will be in a few years."

A sharp, stabbing pain silenced Ruth Overton. She closed her eyes tight and set her jaws. Her face grew ashen, then she said in jerky phrases, "The dirt under me is moving. Moves when the top up there moves. Feel—"

She fainted. Tim understood. The roots tearing loose were breaking up the ground. He expected that might happen and was prepared. It was a long chance, but long chances were commonplace in the big timber. He caught the girl under her arms and watched the tree. A sudden gust was pressing it hard and near-by trees were crashing down. Suddenly the top was several feet off center. It hesitated, then snapped back, to sway off center the opposite way. Fibers deep in the tree's heart snapped under the leverage; the ground cracked and heaved under his feet and he heard the girl moan.

Then the earth broke and he pulled with all his strength. Her imprisoned foot was released so suddenly he fell backwards, her body half across his stomach. Ice showered down as he got to his feet and ran.

Sometime later he stopped and looked back. Ice, bark and shattered trunk littered the spot where Ruth had been pinned down. He pushed on, his arms burdened with the limp girl; his steps shorter. A half mile from the tree he stopped, placed the girl gently on the ground, and relaxed, his rusty head cupped in his big hands.

Ruth's eyes opened. She noticed sweat had gathered about his lashes and frozen. The brim of his hat was completely coated with it. Zero weather is rarely, if ever, known in the timbered regions of the Puget Sound country, but she knew it was close to zero now.

"I saw you stay while that tree was falling," she said in a low voice, "and pull me free. You wouldn't have done as much for one of my brothers. You'd have preferred to watch him die."

"Wrong!" he answered. "I'd have saved his life if I could—for the privilege of fighting him to a finish, later." He picked her up again, and this time did not stop until he found a ranger's cabin.

It was built in a clearing, beyond the reach of trees, and the walls and roof were coated with ice. He hurled his weight against the door and it flew inward; then he carried Ruth to a bunk. There was a small box filled with kindling, and wood stacked along the wall. Tim built a fire and fed it with strips of pitchy wood until the stovepipe was red hot, then he hung up blankets to dry out.

"Now we'll have a look at that leg," he announced. He removed one boot, cut off the other, then stripped off her wool socks. The tin pants followed and

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he examined the leg, which was badly bruised and swollen.

Tim pressed his fingers gently along the bones and she made no outcry until he touched the ankle. "Sorry," he said, "but *that* hurt. I don't think it's broken though."

"I didn't intend to scream," she said, but it happened all at once.

"When the tree fell, a knob prevented a crushed leg," he explained, "but it pinned you there, nevertheless. When the next tree went down I pulled, figuring there might be a moment when the breaking ground under your foot might give enough clearance to pull you free. It worked out that way."

"I used up a lot of Overton luck today," she answered. "Now go ahead and do what must be done. . . . I'll stand it."

THE Forest Service had stocked the cabin with a first aid kit, fuel and food. A telephone was screwed to the wall, but Tim knew the wire was grounded in hundreds of places and probably broken. He bandaged the girl's ankle, then prepared a meal.

Ruth ate in silence. It had been hours since either had tasted food. He washed the dishes, then lighted a pipe and relaxed in the nearest chair.

"Queer," he presently observed, "we two would be thrown together like this."

"The answer is simple enough," she suggested. "A cold snap jumps the mountains and freezes things solid. Then a high rain rolls in from the Pacific and freezes as it falls. We have a silver thaw. I wonder what is happening to Overton timber; you become curious about Donovan timber, we investigate and a gale roars in without warning and we're caught."

"Sure," he admitted, "that's why I was up here."

As far back as there was any record the Overtons had lived in the mountains. Proud, independent, they regarded the people who lived in the lower country as enemies. There had been periods when the valley people had crushed the Overtons, but the clan had never been wiped out. Down through the centuries there had been moments when the Overtons had met others on something approaching common ground. But not often.

There had been love marriages, and even marriages by capture. Sometimes there had been unions without marriage. As Ruth reflected on this she had an odd feeling she had been through all this before. The storm; the stalking creature peering down as she lay helpless; an enemy man answering her cry for aid. Even the steel of that enemy's arms seemed familiar. But of course that was long ago, she decided.

SHE, the present Ruth Overton, had nothing in common with big Tim Donovan. "Well, here we are, two people who hate each other," she said, "and we might as well make the best of it."

"Hate?" His eyes flashed in response to the challenge he had seen in hers. "Hate's a strong word, Ruth. I've never even taken the trouble to hate the Overtons. I'd enjoy giving your men folks a good drubbing, though."

"You'll never see the day when you can whip my weakest brother," she retorted with spirit. "I would like to know, though, why you didn't kill old Phantom? He's too old to hunt deer, so he hunts humans. He should be killed."

"I suppose so," Tim agreed. "Did Kentucky Logan ever tell you about the big fire twenty years ago?"

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"Yes," she answered. "Your father saw a cougar make her choice, and it influenced him. It would!" Contempt crept into her voice. "He returned home and chose the son to take his place. From that day Bud got the attention and you got the worst of the deal."

"I've always found a lot of comfort in believing that old Phantom was the cougar kitten left in that big fire to shift for itself," Tim said slowly. "The scar on its back proves it. There's never been a big fire in these parts since."

"And if the cougar could make a mistake in her selection," Ruth suggested, "you believe it's possible your father might have made a similar mistake?"

"I'm not saying that," he answered. "I'm saying I've found plenty of comfort in old Phantom."

"Old Cyclone Dan made a mistake then," the girl said positively, "and he's been making mistakes ever since. He'll make another within a month. He'll decide Bud's down timber must be logged and yours left to the worms."

"You're wrong," he growled, suddenly loyal. "I'll get a fair break this time."

"The old devil will make you lie down or fight," she predicted, "and that will suit Jacques Gaspard and the Overtons just fine."

"That's something to sleep on," he remarked dryly. "I think I'll turn in! If there's anything you want, just yell." He knocked the ashes from his pipe, placed a tin of water within reach, and hoisted his bulk into the upper bunk.

She saw his sharply calked boots swing as he unlashed them. Presently they dropped and he stretched his toes briefly and swung his long legs from view. The bunk creaked, but after a while he relaxed and sighed. By his heavy breathing she knew Tim Donovan slept. Such was his faith Cyclone Dan would back his hand in logging the down timber he was not even giving the matter a thought.

It was snug within, Ruth decided, and the big fellow's presence in the bunk above gave her a feeling of security—something she would not have felt necessary if possessed of two good legs. Outside the storm raged and the boom of falling trees came often.

CHAPTER IV.

NINE BIG OVERTONS.

THE storm was over when Tim awakened and rain was falling steadily on the roof. It is difficult for snow or ice to remain long in the Pacific Northwest, with the Pacific Ocean hurling warm moisture at it.

There was more than a falling rain visible when he wiped the window and looked out. Nine big, raw-boned men were coming in single file down the trail. They moved with the swift, tireless stride of the mountain-bred man, quickened today by the lash of anxiety. The eldest was bearded, the others had shaved recently. Tim had known most of them at school, and had fought those he knew.

"The boys are coming, Ruth," he said in a low voice, "all nine of them. At least three of them have threatened to shoot me on sight."

"And you certainly deserve it, Tim," she said with feeling. "But, a Forest Service cabin is neutral ground. And, besides, I haven't forgotten yesterday."

"That doesn't count," he said. "The Overtons would have done the same for me. This game has *some* rules."

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"Has it?" he taunted. "I hadn't heard. I'll say this for Gaspard, he never tried to induce the Government to declare Rainbow Falls a power site and build a dam that would flood Overton timber as Cyclone Dan did. But I mustn't start an argument now. The boys, bless their hearts, might lose their tempers and forget themselves."

Tim walked to the door and put the Overtons on the defensive. "Come in, boys," he invited, enjoying their surprise. "Ruth's here, safe and sound except for a twisted ankle."

"How'd she get here?" Enoch, the eldest, demanded. "Ain't seen her tracks."

"Sometimes people go places and don't leave tracks," Tim drawled.

They filed in and presently the air was heavy with the odor of moonshine breaths and drying woolens. The Overtons, traveling light, were relying on good corn liquor to see them through. Each generous nose bore a drop of moisture in addition to a ruby glow; each battered hat carried a puddle of water in its brim—a puddle which promptly spilled on something or someone when its owner glanced downward.

Their sister was the first concern, and questions filled the air. In a way they were grateful to Tim Donovan. In another respect they were annoyed and seemed to consider it particularly unfortunate that an enemy had rendered service.

Hard fists, dangling from long, bronzed arms, grudgingly relaxed, but Enoch growled, "Ruthie, the prettiest sight I ever did see is that Donovan timber, layin' flatter'n a pancake." He scowled. "And I've a mind to make it unanimous, as the feller says, by layin' Tim, here, flat."

"There's no fences around you, Enoch," Tim said quickly, sliding along the wall until his back was in a corner.

"You stop it, both of you!" Ruth ordered. "This is neutral ground."

"Hell, now, Ruthie," Klone Overton complained, "old Cyclone Dan always has a Swede bodyguard with him; Bud, he never gets into the woods, so Tim's the first Donovan we've had a chance to work on for a long spell. . . ." He glanced hopefully from his sister to another brother.

Kentucky Logan, unable to remember the nine given names of the Overton boys, had turned to the Chinook dialect for help. Enoch was number one and he could remember his name, but the second was called Mox, which is two; the third, Klone, and so on. The names stuck.

"All right, you hillbillies," Tim said, "the coffee's boiling over and if we're not going to fight we might as well drink." He filled a cup and handed it to Ruth.

LATER they improvised a stretcher, wrapped the girl carefully in blankets and started for home. Tim put the cabin in order and left an hour later. The Forest Service trail was completely blocked by down timber, but he worked his way through it, estimating, roughly, the number of board feet that would require logging within the year.

After that, the various pests which infest timber would probably render it unmarketable. By the time he reached the nearest Donovan spur Tim had a fairly good idea how to approach the problem and an estimate of what it would cost.

It was evening before he arrived at Mill City and the big white house the Donovans called home. Cyclone Dan

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Donovan, powerful and grim, with not an ounce more weight than he had carried twenty years ago, stood on the porch, his eyes on distant ridges. Bud Donovan, an exact duplicate of Cyclone in build and weight, stood at his elbow. Behind Cyclone stood Chris Nord, the Donovan woods boss.

Nord was a physical giant, with pale blue eyes, straw colored hair and the biggest fists the Puget Sound country had ever seen. It was said, among loggers, the Swede served in the dual capacity of woods boss and Cyclone's bodyguard.

The Swede scowled. He hated Tim because he had developed into a better logger than Bud and himself. The present was an example of what was constantly taking place. While the three were discussing the probable damage, Tim was barging in with a report.

"What'd you find, Tim?" Cyclone asked.

"It's a hell of a mess," Tim answered. "Overton's lost a lot, eighty per cent of the stand I inherited from mother is down, and about sixty per cent of the stuff Bud inherited is flat."

"Any ideas?" Cyclone grunted.

"Sure," Tim replied. "A spur up Deuce Creek will tap most of my stuff. We can turn east, follow the ridge and clean up Bud's. Then if we make peace with the Overtons . . ."

"Peace . . . Hell!" Cyclone roared. "You're always talking of peace."

"And always fighting for what I get," Tim flared. "If we take Overton's logs out it'll help pay the cost of building the road. And it'll cost plenty, because we've got to work fast." He studied his father's face with the hope of catching the trend of his thoughts. But that calk-scarred face betrayed nothing.

The scars never failed to interest Tim. He knew his father had never been knocked off his feet, but he knew, too, Cyclone had gone to the floor with an enemy on many occasions and that he had been tramped on in free-for-all fights. He was never quite sure, but it seemed as if the scars flushed slightly when Cyclone was angry. Now he watched for signs, but there were none. "He didn't blow up when I suggested we log Bud's and my timber jointly, so—" Tim's thoughts were suddenly interrupted.

"Bud," Cyclone said, "I think we'll figger on logging only your stuff and letting the rest go. The market's loaded with lumber now, and if we throw all that down stuff on it it'll crack wide open."

"People are betting you'd double-cross me on this," Tim said evenly, "but I didn't think you would."

CHRIS NORD edged closer and began rubbing his ponderous right fist with his thick, left hand. "Aye feel fer fight!" he said.

"Shut up, Chris," Tim snapped. "Some of these days you'll choose me once too often." He turned to his father. "People have let everything go during these hard times. And that includes lumber for repairs, not to mention the thousands of new homes that should replace condemned structures. If we could land that big Tracy contract in California, our yards would be cleaned and every down stick absorbed within a year."

"I'm going after that Tracy contract," Cyclone informed Tim, "and I expect to get it! But my plans don't include your stuff."

Tim Donovan knew he was white with fury. The Swede's eyes revealed that. Plainly Nord expected something to happen and he was prepared for it.

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"I'll say what's on your mind," Tim said thickly. "I'm trapped, and you know it. Unless I can make a deal with you to use your logging road I can't log that stuff. That is, I can't unless I build a road of my own. That would mean condemning a right of way through your land."

"Which is slow and costly," Cyclone suggested.

"And the cost of the construction and rails would put me in the red if I logged every down tree and sold it at a fair price," Tim said. "I'll admit, it looks as if you've got me. But don't be too sure. I'm beginning to get an idea."

A brightness came into Cyclone's hard blue eyes. "Go ahead," he said. "I think you're bluffing. You can't get that timber out of there without going broke."

"What's your price for taking my logs out over your road?" Tim asked.

Cyclone scratched his head, as if in deep thought. "Right now it looks as if there's going to be a lot of traffic over that road. There'll be my normal tonnage, then on top of that all of Bud's stuff . . . yes, the traffic is going to be heavy—about all the road will stand," Cyclone said slowly. "I'm afraid I can't do anything for you."

"Thanks for letting me know exactly where I stand," Tim said. "Now I can go ahead. I may lose my shirt, or I may clean up a barrel of money, but either way I'm not going to take this lying down."

Tim's eyes were almost slits; his face was flushed at the injustice of it all, and unconsciously his fists clenched. "There isn't room enough for two Donovans in this set-up," he said to his father. "So I may as well pull my freight."

"Stay or not," Cyclone answered, "that's up to you. You're twenty-three and should know your own mind and be able to stand on your own hind legs—if you're ever going to."

"Come to think of it," Tim retorted, "you've made it tough for me ever since you decided Bud is the heir-apparent . . ."

"When did I ever say Bud is the heir-apparent?" Cyclone demanded sharply.

"Hell, you don't need to put it in words," Tim answered. "It's apparent, and that's no pun. You've made it tough for me, so I'm going to make it tough for you. I'm going to stay here until you kick me out." And with that he yanked off his calked boots and stalked into the house.

Five long minutes were spent in calming down, then he jumped into a tub of hot water, finished off with a cold shower and felt better. Tim ate, then unrolled a map of the Olympic Peninsula.

THE peninsula jutted from the main part of the Pacific slope like the stub of a shingle-weaver's thumb. Numerous streams drained the vast wilderness, which actually is the Last West. Some flowed eastward into Puget Sound, such as the Duckabush and Docewallops. The Dungeness and Elwha flow northward into the straits; while the Skookum, Quillayute and Humptulips flow generally westward into the Pacific.

It was the Skookum River, emptying into Scow Bay on the Pacific, which held much of Tim's interest. He studied it at length, reviewing the brawling stream in his mind. He had fished the length of it, and had once gone through Hell-roaring Canyon on a log to win a bet.

It was midnight before he turned in,

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but he had figured out a lot of things and some of them were born of desperation.

At noon the following day he was walking down Mill City's main street when Jacques Gaspard hailed him. He turned.

"Yes, Gaspard, what is it?"

Gaspard had not done badly in twenty years. The clanking green chain dragging logs from the pond into the mill; the whining saws; the long wharf at which a Japanese steamer was loading squares were all his. Even the squares were his until the ship's tackle lifted them.

"It has come to my ears, Tim," Gaspard said smoothly, "that your father has thrown you over. I know the situation. Your back is to the wall. No? I can save your timber and make a fortune for you . . ."

"Not interested," Tim answered shortly.

"Not interested when your own father won't back you up?" Gaspard softly insisted. "I've got the money, the power, and you're the best young logger in the country . . ."

Gaspard kept pace with Tim. Their boots fell in unison on the calk-chewed wood walk.

"Blood's thicker than water," Tim said. "Your history's pretty well known, Gaspard."

"Yes . . . and my success!" Gaspard grimly observed. He had an idea he could use Tim to break Cyclone. In one masterful move he would gain control of that part of the Peninsula.

"How would you like twelve thousand a year as my superintendent, and a fifty-fifty split on every acre of timber we can take from your father?" Gaspard asked. "Sweet revenge! No? How would you like—"

Tim flung his open hand across Gaspard's mouth. "And how'd you like to go to hell?" he asked.

CHAPTER V.

"AYE FEEL FER FIGHT!"

TIM left Gaspard, knowing he had increased the man's hate for the Donovans. Had Gaspard been younger Tim would have used his fist instead of the open hand. "I'll hear from him again," he predicted. "He has a way of making himself known when a man least expects it."

Tim turned into the Mill City Bank and went directly to the president. "Mr. Monroe," he said, "you know what's happened to my timber. You know what it's worth, logged."

"Five hundred thousand dollars if we include the Overtons," Monroe answered. "That is, laid down in a mill pond. It's a fire hazard and a liability where it is now."

"Exactly! How about a loan?" Tim said. "And no hemming and hawing and letting me down easy."

Monroe smiled. "I like you, Tim," he said, then began shaking his head. "Your father telephoned me you'd likely call. He said you're not a good risk at the present time. And I guess that settles it."

"I see," Tim replied. "You've dealt with him a long time, and . . ."

Tim, except for an odd twist in his make-up which moved him to select a son to take his place, and then stay with his choice, your father is one of the finest men I know. He drives a hard bargain, but he's never been known to destroy those in his way," Monroe said. "I happen to know the efforts Gaspard has made to destroy him. I know the fights he has made against overwhelming odds. He has

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always paid fair wages; his men swear by him, you know that. And . . . well, I'll string with Cyclone, Tim."

"I knew you would," Tim answered, "if it came to a choice. I hoped it wouldn't."

Before he left he checked over his balance and the worth of a number of bonds his mother had left him. The total was a modest nest egg, but hardly a start on large scale operations.

From the bank he legged it to Loggers' Supplies, Inc. The local manager met him. "You've got some used equipment I need," Tim said briskly. "I want that big yarder, too." He indicated a powerful donkey engine, with spark arrester slanting at an angle like a drunken man's hat. "Here's my price, cash. Take it or leave it."

"Why the sudden hurry, Tim?" the manager asked. "I—er—"

"It's a fair price, isn't it? I can do as well or better in Seattle, can't I?" Tim argued. "This outfit is just what I need to handle that down timber in the Skookum River watershed. Now is it a deal?"

"Yes," the manager said.

"And a good deal, too," Tim drawled. "You haven't moved a yarder or a spool of steel wire in a year."

He handed the man a check.

AT that moment the telephone rang. "Hello," the manager said. "Oh, yes, Mr. Donovan. Yes. He's here now. Want to speak to him? Oh. Hmmmm! Yes-s-s-s-s! Ye-es-s-s, I'm afraid not. You see he's already paid me for the equipment."

"And if you go back on the deal I'll sue you to hell and back," Tim rasped.

"Really, Mr. Donovan, the deal has been completed. I'm sorry," the manager mumbled. "If you'd telephoned me a few minutes sooner. Good-by." He was perspiring when he hung up. "It was your father, Tim, and he's raising hell because I sold you this stuff. Loggers' Supplies has lost a good customer."

"And gained another," Tim said. "I'll pick this stuff up later." He needed power, cables, blocks and good men to save the timber. The next problem would be to place the heavy machinery on the job. But first, he needed men. He had an idea he could find them that evening at Loggers' Rest, a waterfront saloon, where there was rest neither for loggers nor others.

Tim stopped at the local telephone exchange and called Tracy long distance. "This is Tim Donovan speaking," he said as soon as he got his party. "I'm going it alone and I want a chance to bid on that lumber contract. I think I can shade my competitors' prices some."

"Okay, Tim," Tracy answered, "if you can fill the order. Cash or certified check amounting to five per cent must accompany your bid. I'll air mail the specifications to you. You can bid either f.o.b. ship's tackle, or lumber laid down on our wharf in California."

"I'll lay it down on your wharf," Tim answered.

He left with a strong sense of elation. Tracy evidently had confidence in the Donovans. Tim knew of certain loggers and millmen who were denied an opportunity to bid. One of them was Gaspard.

Nine o'clock that evening he entered the Loggers' Rest, where he expected to find the men who could get a donkey and equipment to Skookum Ridge. It was his plan to buck the down timber and haul it to centrally located cold decks as soon as possible. The transportation problem would come later.

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Three bartenders were hard at work sliding beer along the bar—and stronger beverages on occasion. The heavy smoke haze gave the lights a subdued, bluish appearance. The blending of many voices was like the drone of a hive. But a hush settled over the place as Tim entered.

He failed to observe his father and Chris Nord seated at a card table, talking. He saw Gaspard turn, stare and walk out, and he was puzzled at something he caught in the man's eyes. It was faint, elusive, yet in a way definite. For possibly a split second Gaspard had lowered his mask.

"WHAT'LL it be, Tim?" the nearest bartender said cheerfully as the batwing doors closed on Gaspard.

"A slug of squareface is food, shelter and clothing on a night like this, they say," Tim answered.

The bartender reached under the bar, spilled something from a bottle into a beer mug and shoved it at Tim. The latter tossed it off and felt the warm glow of good rum steal through his system. "Has Trig Larson been in tonight?" he asked.

"Hello, Tim!" A rawboned Nordic came from a group of loggers. "I heard you taking my name in vain."

"Trig, I'm here to offer you the best job you ever had. It's a tough one, but if we win out you'll be sitting pretty. You can pick your own crew and . . . what's the matter?" Tim asked in a lowered voice.

"Your old man and Chris Nord are taking this in," Trig said. "Everybody knows you've split, and Cyclone's let it be known we can work for who we damned well please, but if we work for you, then we'll never be on his pay roll again."

"I savvy, Trig. You've got yourself to think of, naturally, and it's all right." Tim noticed his father for the first time. Cyclone was relaxed and confident. He smoked in the manner of a man completely in control of a situation. Behind him towered the Swede woods boss, obviously spoiling for a fight.

At that moment Nord unburdened his mind. "Bay Yeez, Cyclone," he jeered, "you got Tim stopped before he even got started. He don't know whether he's comin' or goin'."

"Shut up, you crazy squarehead," Tim flared. "Get out of the way. I'm going to have a word with my father."

Chris Nord stepped forward and blocked the way. "Aye feel fer fight," he said, rubbing his right fist with the palm of his left hand.

Tim spread his elbows and backed up slightly, a signal to those crowding around that he might need room. A tall, lanky figure brushed by him and stepped around the Swede. It was Kentucky Logan and his face was serious. He seated himself at the table and said, "Cyclone, you'd better stop that!" He jerked his head towards Tim and Nord. "And there're other things you'd better stop, Cyclone," he advised in a voice so low those around did not catch his words. "You can't afford a break with Tim. Together you Donovans are unbeatable, but singly . . ."

"Singly we Donovans are unbeatable," Cyclone crisply observed.

"I've seen two strong dogs fight to exhaustion, then a cur jumped in and cleaned both of them," Kentucky said. "The cur just went out the door to wait. His name is Gaspard."

The big room was suddenly silent. Loggers had long debated what would happen if Tim Donovan and Chris

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Nord met in a finish fight. It looked as if the question would be answered. Nord, a man-crusher by nature, had already said too much. Tim was deathly white and shaking with anger. His burning eyes never left the Swede's face; and his lips curled with contempt.

It was his code that if you saw trouble coming beat the other fellow to the punch. But for various reasons he wanted Nord to start the fight, or back down. "You're in my way," he said. "Now get out!"

"Aye feel fer fight," Nord answered, then his ponderous fist swung.

Tim let it whistle past his ear and hung a left on Nord's face that flattened his big nose. "You've been asking for this a long time, Nord," he growled. "You're just one of a lot of hurdles and I'm taking you first."

"Even money the Swede kills him," a logger offered, holding up a ten-dollar bill.

"We'll take that," two Civilian Conservation Corps boys answered, pooling their entire resources. "Wade in, Donovan; we'll keep the Swede's friends off'n your back."

Cyclone Dan Donovan said nothing. But as Nord charged the second time, driving the lighter man into a corner, Cyclone stood up on a chair. And the expression in his eyes baffled even Kentucky Logan, who knew him well.

CHAPTER VI.

STRANGE BEDFELLOWS.

AS Tim Donovan and Chris Nord leaped into a finish fight that was mutually agreeable, business in the Loggers' Rest stopped. Cyclone Dan Donovan hardly moved as he stood on a heavy chair, his hand leaning on the wall. But his eyes missed nothing. Kentucky Logan, friend of everyone in the logging country, with one or two exceptions, stood by Cyclone.

Every table and chair was occupied by standing men, and they lined the wall three deep. Some twenty-five or thirty CCC boys filtered in. Gathered from all parts of the country, many of them were seeing a loggers' fight for the first time. There appeared to be no rules, and the starkness of it aroused strange emotions in their breasts.

They were young, and naturally their sympathy was with youth—Tim Donovan. Chris Nord was under thirty, but when one is eighteen, thirty is old. Again and again their voices demanded the kill; and often they did not know they were yelling.

Methodically Tim threw punches into Nord's stomach, and when the man lowered his arms in defense he cracked him on the jaw. Nord cornered Tim at last and closed in, his head bowed like an angry bull's, his jaw protected by his heaving chest. Great sobs came from his lungs, but he managed to gas, "Aye got you now!"

Tim's ribs gave under the vise-like clutch. His breath left his lungs in a burst. He drove his shaggy, rusty head into the Swede's face until he relaxed his grip, then he jerked free, leaving most of his shirt in Nord's fingers.

Now those grouped about saw the muscles rippling beautifully under the hard flesh; saw them whip and snap as Tim battered away at his enemy, striving to drain the man's vast store of vitality before his own store was spent.

"You're gettin' him, Tim!" the CCC crowd yelled. "His eyes are beginning to glaze. Look, they're rolling."

The giant logger was actually totter-

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ing. His massive arms covered his stomach and ribs, he bowed his head and struggled to fight off the fog smothering his brain.

A swarthy fellow who had bet on Nord drew his toes up in his right foot and then thrust it forward as Tim stepped back. One of Tim's calks cut through the upper, missed the man's toes, and sunk into the sole. The swarthy man jerked and as Tim's foot cleared he tripped over his own leg.

It was done so swiftly, so neatly, not a man noticed the trick. All they saw was Tim falling to the floor.

"He's down, Nord!" a dozen yelled. "Quick!"

Nord's head lifted and his clearing eyes grasped the situation completely. "Aye got you now," he grunted. "Aye . . ." He jumped, caught up a heavy cut glass punch bowl from the bar and crashed it with all of his strength down on Tim, who was striving desperately to rise.

The bowl struck him between the shoulders. He went down, then Nord jumped. Kentucky Logan half started forward as he saw the gleaming calks of the Swede's descending boots. Those calks went deep, but Tim's groping arms caught Nord's legs and threw him.

Before Tim could follow up this advantage, Nord had straddled him. "Aye roll you over, bay Yeez," he panted, "and Aye make you squeal like stuck pig."

THERE was no escaping Nord's hold. With Chris' weight pinning Tim to the floor and his thick legs pressed on either side, he could only squirm. And Tim, after one swift glance, squirmed. Only Kentucky Logan sensed his strategy. Suddenly Nord turned his enemy over and sat down on his chest. "Now squeal!" he panted.

He banged Tim's head down on a mat, made of crossed strips of steel, then he drew his right fist back and held it a moment. Someone's, "He'll break in Tim's face!" crashed on tight nerves and half those in the room jumped.

Tim's eyes were little more than calculating slits. The ponderous fist descended with all of Nord's weight behind it. Tim's head jerked to the right. And the fist struck the steel matting.

Nord winced and drew his dripping fist from the matting. He looked at it stupidly, as a bear might regard a wounded paw. "Aye . . . get . . . you!" he gasped, and then drove in his left. Again hard bone met rigid steel.

Nord's hands were gone, but a blind, animal instinct lashed him to fighting on for self-preservation. He had his booted feet left and along with the pain in his eyes was the determination to stamp the life from this man.

Tim saw it, and as Nord shifted he drew up his knees in a single, swift movement, then drove out his own feet, knocking Nord backwards.

"Kill the big squarehead!" someone yelled. "Kill . . ."

"You've lost your bodyguard," a logger taunted, shaking his fist in Cyclone Donovan's face. "And now you'll damned well be knocked off your feet."

Cyclone lashed out with his left fist and dropped the man in his tracks, then the lights went out. Kentucky Logan shouted, "Nobody move. We'll have the lights on in a second!"

But the spell of the primitive fight was on every man. Unconsciously each was on the defensive, when not on the aggressive. They began moving toward the door and the place was filled with shouting, struggling men.

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It seemed hours, but it was less than two minutes before the bartenders had the lights on. "Somebody pulled a switch," one of them yelled. "It's all right now. Drinks are on the house." He wanted to calm them before a free-for-all developed.

A few stepped up, but the CCC boys were flowing through the doors. "Tim Donovan's chased the Swede outside," they were saying. "He's going to finish him."

Mill City seethed with excitement as the saloon emptied. Kentucky Logan turned to Cyclone. "Keep out of the dark places," he warned. "With Nord beaten it's a fine time to pay off old grudges. You've got some robust enemies, Dan."

"I'll give an inch for no man," Cyclone retorted. "If they've grudges to be paid off, let 'em come."

KENTUCKY disappeared through a rear door and hurried down the alley. It was a likely place for the finish. A hundred feet from an intersecting street he narrowly missed stumbling over a bulky object. A street lamp shed a feeble light on Chris Nord's battered features.

"He don't seem to be breathin'," Kentucky muttered.

He felt for a pulse and found none. "Dead!" he exclaimed. Nord's skull looked different. A small square had been flattened. Near by lay a rock. Kentucky struck a match and noticed bits of straw-colored hair on the rock, but he was careful not to touch it. He had no wish to become involved in fingerprint matters.

When the match burned out he dropped it into his pocket. Matches have a way of revealing the owner's identity. Kentucky hurried into the street. "I've got to find Tim," he muttered. "Got to get him under cover until this blows over. Gaspard might prod the authorities into taking action. Tim's a cool one. The way he tricked Nord into breaking up his hands. It was his only chance and he knew it. Nord was set to break in his face."

Kentucky listened a moment. The hunt was still on, so it seemed logical he might find Tim nearer the waterfront. The tide was out, and there was a heavy odor of exposed flats and sawdust rotting in salt water. Gaspard's mill lent a splash of brightness to the pitchy black of night.

The rattle of ship's tackle and the boom of squares loaded to steel decks came constantly.

A figure sitting on a mooring bitt caught Kentucky's eye. He ran over and said, "Tim! What're you doing out here?"

Tim was in a daze. "Seemed like I wanted a lot of cold air," he muttered. "Couldn't get enough. Came out here. I'm sick at the stomach, too."

"Nord jumped on you," Kentucky said. "That's why you're sick."

"Nord! Sure, I remember now. We were fighting. I worked over to a steel mat. He banged my head on it, then I ducked his fists. After that . . . he cleaned me, I guess," Tim concluded.

"Tim, brace up!" Kentucky said sharply. "Nord's dead! You finished him with a rock!"

"Dead! No! I never used a rock. Used my hands . . ." he muttered. "Never use a rock . . ." he argued.

"You've been out on your feet; fighting through instinct," Kentucky said. "You don't know what happened. We've got to get you out of here."

Kentucky looked about for a means of escape. The hunt uptown would cover everything and presently they

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would be searching wharves. The Japanese liner, loading squares, flooded the end of the wharf with light. On the other side of the warehouse which almost covered the dock lay the schooner Ruby. She was loaded, ready for sea, and was awaiting the arrival of a tug from Seattle to tow her past Cape Flattery.

Kentucky hurried Tim to the shadows between the schooner and the warehouse. The craft was deserted except for a watchman; the crew uptown. At her stern lay a skiff. Kentucky brought the skiff alongside the wharf and dropped into it.

He rowed to the nearest float, then helped the dazed Tim down the gangway to the skiff.

As soon as he was aboard Kentucky began rowing, keeping under the wharves as much as possible until beyond the range of Mill City's lights.

He beached the skiff two miles from town, then shook Tim into wakefulness. "You've got to walk now, you big hulk," he said. "I can't pack you."

TIM reeled drunkenly up a game trail, and with frequent prodding by his lanky escort he made two miles an hour. Sometime during the walk his head must have cleared, because as they neared Kentucky's cabin he said, "I can't stay here. I killed Nord, didn't I?"

He looked the lanky mountaineer squarely in the eye and demanded the truth. "You said something about it down on the wharf. But I can't figure that rock angle. That part of the fight won't clear up."

"Nord's dead. Or at least I couldn't feel any pulse," Kentucky answered. "We'll try to figure something out at the cabin."

When they arrived he ordered Tim to lie down on a bunk while he made hot coffee. While the coffee was coming to a boil, Kentucky examined Tim's scalp. "He cut you up plenty when he banged your head on that mat," he said, "but I guess the most damage was done when he jumped on your middle."

Tim almost nodded—almost, but not quite. If he confessed any internal injury Kentucky would insist on keeping him at the cabin for observation, and he knew the sheriff's first point of search would be Kentucky's usual haunts. "The innards don't hurt any more," he said. "I came through in good shape, considering it was a finish fight."

"Nord's death kinda handicaps your plans for logging that down timber," Kentucky ventured.

"I've got to keep under cover," Tim answered, "and work through a damned good crew."

"There isn't a man in these parts who'll work for you, Tim," Kentucky bluntly stated. "They don't want to get in wrong with your father. And he's dealt fair with them. They're rememberin' that, too."

"I found out what I was up against at Loggers' Rest after a talk with Trig Larson," Tim explained. "But there's an answer to every question. The problem is to figure the answer. In this case it's Civilian Conservation Corps. Roughly six hundred thousand boys have gone through the mill. They're timber-minded, as you might say. They've learned how to take care of themselves in the woods."

"That's so," Kentucky admitted after a moment's reflection. "And they're an adventurous lot; young and willing to gamble."

"That's it—willing to gamble. From the CCC camps hereabouts I'll

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get a crew that'll take a chance," Tim said.

KENTUCKY urged him to continue, at the same time watching the younger man narrowly for signs which might indicate a cloudy brain. He wasn't just sure, but it seemed as if Tim was trying to tell everything at once; to force his brain to formulate complete plans. Yet so far he was not irrational.

"I'll need money," he said suddenly, "and I'd better get it out of the bank before my account is tied up." He fumbled in his pocket and drew out a checkbook. He scribbled hastily and thrust the check at Kentucky. "The check's made out to you," he said. "Draw out everything and cache it. Then it'll be ready as I need it."

"Anything you say," Kentucky agreed. The amount was just under ten thousand dollars, and Tim reasoned the balance would be somewhere around that figure after the bank had disposed of his securities at the present market figure. "But that's a lot of money for a man to pack around his hip pocket," the mountaineer added.

"The next thing is to get the equipment on the job," Tim said, ignoring the other's observation.

"How?"

"A man with a murder or manslaughter charge over his head can't stop at little things," Tim answered. "I'll steal one of the old man's locomotives, and a few flat cars; load the stuff and run it up his main line to Deuce Creek. From there we'll get the outfit to Skookum Ridge. The yarder can make it under its own power."

"Then what?"

"If I get the Tracy contract and have my equipment on the job, a bank should listen to reason," Tim answered. "With money I could build a truck road to government range, then reach the Sound. But that's expensive. There's another way—shoot logs down the Skookum River and . . ."

"Did you ever see a log after it had gone through Hell-roaring Canyon?" Kentucky demanded. "Wait a minute! You're going to tell me you rode a log through the canyon. You're a damned good white water man; you controlled the log to some extent. Also, you had Donovan luck. But you can't ride every log through. They'll come out looking like something that's been through a pulp mill. After that . . . the sea. You can't take saw logs through the surf; no need of building a mill because schooners can't get in there except when the tide is 'way high."

Kentucky went on, through sheer friendship and worry, pointing out that nothing could be gained by taking lumber out on scows and loading schooners anchored off shore. The cost would break him, and any bank which might advance a loan would forbid any such action. Furthermore, if the bank saw a possible loss it would take over the timber and sell out to Cyclone Donovan at its own figure.

"And that would be defeat," Tim admitted. "But I've still got an ace in the hole—a gamble that'll make your hair curl. I can turn to that, if I *have* to." He got to his feet. "I'll borrow some grub, Kentucky, and drift before the sheriff shows up."

Kentucky made up a pack, held it while Tim slipped his shoulders through it, then watched him disappear into the black night.

INSTEAD of turning in, Kentucky unrolled a map which showed, in colors, the different holdings of the various logging outfits. There was

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Gaspard's reaching from tidewater towards the mountains like a choking black hand. If the Donovans fought themselves to a weakened condition, a half dozen independent loggers would be at Gaspard's mercy.

They were holding their timber until Donovan's spur tracks were within striking distance, then they would log, which would give them a good profit, and the Donovan railroad needed tonnage. If Donovan failed, then the independents must accept Gaspard's harsh terms.

"And since the fight between Tim and the old man became known, there's talk of the independents and Gaspard getting together," Kentucky muttered. "For the first time the little fellows are afraid. It's bad! I can't understand Cyclone. In the thirty years he's been in this country he's never made a serious mistake. At times it may have looked like he was blunderin', but in the end it turned out he'd made a smart move. But this break with Tim . . . Now, I wonder . . . no! Cyclone's making a mistake this time, sure as hell."

If Gaspard forced the independents to merge, then the black hand crawling over the map and clutching everything in its path would be tremendously strengthened. "And it looks as if they'll merge," Kentucky mused. "Logging sure makes strange bedfellows. And what of the Overtons? Hell, they'll be out in the cold." He shook his head gloomily.

CHAPTER VII.

MELLOWED.

TIM DONOVAN crossed a brawling creek, climbed a ridge and dropped down to his father's main line. Here and there trees had fallen across the rails during the silver thaw and a cherry picker—a derrick attached to a flat car and powered by a small donkey—was lifting the trees clear. He passed operations unnoticed by the crew and struck up Deuce Creek.

A Forest Service trail made progress easy until he encountered his own timber, then the trail vanished. He left it and struggled over the heaps of fallen trees, back-tracking occasionally to make pursuit difficult.

Suddenly Tim stopped and clutched a shattered tree for support. The forest was spinning before his eyes. The stars, the somber tree tops, and the forest floor merged into a blur. He felt desperately sick all over. "I thought I could barge through to the old Seaton cabin," he muttered, "but I guess I'd better—"

A roar like the breaking of surf crashed against his eardrums. He felt himself soaring through space, then a wall of blackness blotted everything out.

"Feel better now?" A girl's voice, vaguely familiar, aroused Tim. He was stretched out on the ground and his pack had been removed. It partly supported his head, and when his vision cleared he noticed it was growing lighter in the east.

"Hello . . . Ruth . . . where'd you come from?" Tim asked.

"The dogs set up a howling," Ruth Overton answered, "and wouldn't shut up. I couldn't sleep with the uproar, so turned them loose. I knew by their baying they were after a cougar. There's a bounty on cougars, so I dressed, grabbed a rifle and lantern and followed."

"Old Phantom?" he asked, suddenly.

"Yes, he seems to play a strange part in your life," the girl answered. "But for the dogs I think he'd have finished

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you. He's up in that tree." She nodded to a hundred foot fir with a bushy top, two hundred feet away. "One of the pups found you and I'm letting the cat go for the present. What's happened?"

Briefly he related the night's experiences. "I was trying to make it to the Seaton cabin. Few know of it—and it's a good hideout," he concluded.

"And on Overton property," she added. "I don't know what to do with you. I'm constitutionally opposed to turning anyone over to the law. We Overtons hate the law as much as the Donovans." She regarded him curiously. "You're sick, mighty sick, and I can't leave you here. And you *did* stick by me during the big storm."

She helped Tim to his feet and drew his arm across her shoulders. A lot of his weight was on her, but she managed to get him to a trail. She stopped on the edge of a clearing and studied a cluster of cabins, barely visible in the gray of dawn.

"I honestly believe Pap would horsewhip me if he knew I was helping you," she said. "Of course that makes no difference. Come on!"

FIFTY yards from the largest cabin she removed Tim's boots. Robust snores came from near-by cabins where some of the Overton brothers slept. "Follow me," she whispered. He walked unsteadily into a cabin built to endure. Bear rugs and rag mats covered the whip-sawed floor. The stairs creaked under his weight until it seemed as if the entire household must be aroused, yet nothing happened.

From the second floor he climbed a ladder into a loft.

The lantern revealed a spinning wheel, frames containing family pictures, broken furniture and spare parts for a still. She made a bed on an old mattress and brought a pitcher of water. "Maybe rest will help you," she said. "Maybe it is serious—I don't know. Listen!" The sound of baying dogs came faintly. "Old Phantom's left the tree and they're after him."

"He'll get away," Tim predicted. He brightened somewhat, then closed his eyes in utter weariness.

Ruth Overton closed the trap door and quietly descended the ladder.

The brother Kentucky Logan called Klone Overton aroused the household at daybreak. "Hell poppin' in Mill City," he shouted. "Tim Donovan and Chris Nord met in a free-for-all. They claim Tim killed Nord. Hey, Pap! Ruthie! Come an' hear this."

There were various responses, and presently rawboned men in undershirts, tin pants and wool socks gathered. Pap Overton opened the day with a half tumbler filled with moonshine he had run through a still ten years previous. Since then it had lived a quiet life in an oak keg, properly charred.

"Now, son, let's have it," Pap directed. "Ma, you kin start the vittles."

In the midst of Klone's story Tim's voice, partly muffled by two floors and closed doors, came sharply. "What in tarnation's that?" Pap asked.

"I didn't hear a thing," Ruth said. She listened a moment, her eyes narrowing, her body tense. Undoubtedly Tim was out of his head. "I'll set the table, Ma," she offered. And without waiting for her mother to answer, the girl began arranging dishes, making as much noise as possible.

"Dang it, Ruthie," Klone shouted angrily, "don't make so much noice." Then he went on, "The Donovans are at outs; Tim's missing and Gaspard's invited the independents to come in and talk things over."

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He stopped and held up a warning hand. Someone was coming down the stairs. The door opened and Tim Donovan barged into the room. His fists were doubled up, and before one of the brothers could move Tim's right knocked him flat.

"Come on, all of you!" he yelled. "Let's get all this trouble ironed out, then I can log Skookum Ridge. Come on, you big squarehead." He started towards Pap Overton. "To hell with Cyclone and his railroad. We'll get that Tracy contract and shoot 'em down the river. Never mind how I'll get 'em out of Scow Bay, Kentucky. I'll get 'em out. Now cache that ten thousand dollars . . . So you're yellow, you big squarehead."

"Yellow, hell!" Klone bellowed. He squared off and took Tim's measure.

"Get out of the way, Ruthie!" Klone yelled.

"Stop it!" the girl sharply ordered. "Don't you see, Tim Donovan is out of his head. I found him last night and brought him here. I'd hoped to straighten him out without any trouble, but . . . you can't hit him, any of you —until he is well again."

THEY caught Tim's arms and he sent them spinning. "It ain't fittin' beatin' up a man out'n his haid," Pap said. "Don't hurt the cuss. I ain't so sure but he's an answer to a prayer."

The Overtons backed away at the girl's command, then she stepped up.

"Come with me, Tim. You've got to rest," she said quietly.

It was the touch of her hand on his wrist, more than her voice, that quieted him. This time she led him to her own room, then her brothers lashed him to the bed. Pap studied the son of his bitter enemy in silence. His was not a blind sort of hate. He had found it profitable to weigh an enemy with care.

In Tim Donovan he saw rugged good looks, which was unimportant. In his face he saw courage of the highest type; in his broad forehead intelligence. And he liked Tim's rusty head. The greatest fighter the Overtons had ever bred possessed unruly, rusty hair.

In time Tim was quieted and Klone left to watch him. The others gathered around the table for breakfast.

"Somewhere in the Bible it says if a man waits with patience his enemy will be delivered to him, bound. Tim is in there . . . bound."

Those about the table nodded and waited for Pap to proceed. "Tim's goin' after that Tracy contract," Pap continued, "and he's got a scheme to beat old Cyclone. It's suthin' to do with Skookum River and Scow Bay. We're goin' along with him. It's our only chance to save the trees that went down in the silver thaw."

"He's an enemy," Klone called from the bedroom. "He won't throw in with us. He turned Gaspard down cold."

"Gaspard is one kind of enemy; Overtons is another. The Donovans know the difference," Pap insisted. His eyes turned towards Ruth and he was conscious of her wild beauty, the stormy eyes, and boundless energy. As a type she would appeal to a wild Irishman—even a sworn enemy.

"Ten Overtons, including Pap himself, haven't been able to do much with the Donovans," she spiritedly observed, "so now you're turning to me. I can see it in your eyes, Pap." She laughed, half with amusement, half with resentment. "So now you're turning to the girl you've all said was a pest."

"Now! Now! Ruthie," Pap admonished. "Don't go to carryin' on.

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When a man's sick he leans a pile on wimmin-folks."

"You're not sick!" she said.

"But Tim Donovan is. I ain't askin' you to fall in love with him. Fact is I'd forbid such a thing. I'm askin' you to nurse him tender like; make his big hulk putty in your hands and win him to our side so we can get our trees to market," Pap stated. "Is that too much?"

"I'll do it, Pap," she answered. "I'd like to humble old Cyclone, and winning Tim is one way. Besides, when there's only one girl, it's nice to be depended upon."

Pap turned to his sons. "And you boys ain't to even give him a black look.

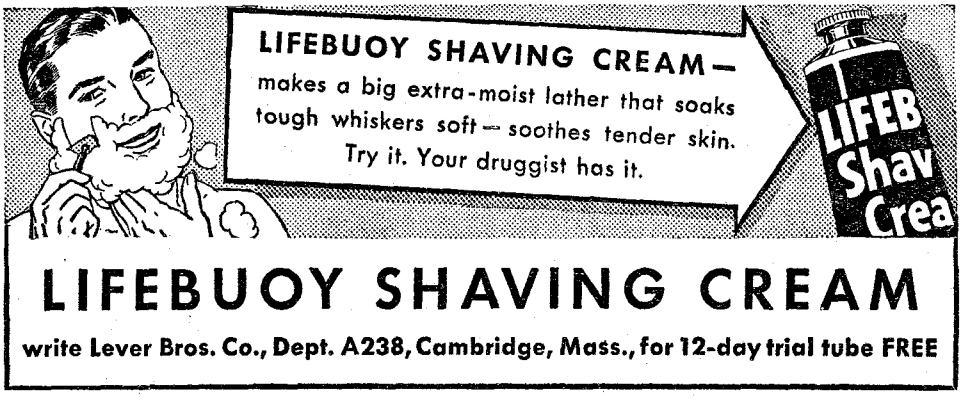
"Your day of reckonin' with Tim Donovan will come when our down timber's in salt water."

TO BE CONTINUED NEXT WEEK.

Well Guarded Gold

ONE of the most valuable public exhibitions to be seen anywhere is the Gold Room of the Metropolitan Museum, in New York City, valued at something like $1,000,000. Each case containing this collection of antique jewelry is wired into a special burglar alarm system and all of the important pieces are separately wired so as to give alarm the instant they are touched. When an alarm is given the iron door of the Gold Room is instantly thrown shut, trapping the culprit inside. Besides these precautions, two men are always on guard.

—*J. W. Holden.*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MEN OF DARING
AN OFFICER OF THE LEGION
DESCENDANT OF A LONG LINE OF WARRIORS, INCLUDING ADMIRAL GUERRARD WHO SERVED SO GALLANTLY WITH LAFAYETTE DURING THE REVOLUTION. SOLDIER, LINGUIST, AVIATOR, HAMILTON IS THE ONLY AMERICAN TO HOLD A COMMISSION IN THE FOREIGN LEGION.
BORN IN WATERBURY, CONN., 1890, HE GRADUATED FROM CARNEGIE INSTITUTE OF TECHNOLOGY. IN 1916, HE ENLISTED IN THE U.S. AMBULANCE SERVICE AND DISTINGUISHED HIMSELF BY DRIVING AMBULANCES FOR LONG PERIODS WITHOUT REST AND UNDER HEAVY SHELLFIRE.
CAPTAIN EDGAR G. Hamilton
TO SATISFY HIS FIGHTING URGE, HE ENLISTED IN THE FOREIGN LEGION IN 1917, BUT WAS TRANSFERRED TO THE AIR SERVICE, WHERE HIS TECHNICAL ABILITY WAS SOON RECOGNIZED AND HE WAS DESIGNATED CHIEF TECHNICAL ADVISOR AT TOURS. THERE HE FLIGHT-TESTED AND MADE REPORTS ON EVERY TYPE OF PLANE THEN KNOWN.
REENLISTING IN THE LEGION IN 1920 FOR SERVICE IN NORTH AFRICA AGAINST ABD-EL-KRIM HE SOON REGAINED HIS COMMISSION AND FOUGHT THAT DOUGHTY RIFF ALMOST CONTINOUSLY FOR 2 YEARS, RECEIVING MANY DECORATIONS. —AT THE SAME TIME HE LEARNED EVERY NATIVE DIALECT.

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AFTER THE SURRENDER OF ABD-EL-KRIM, HE CONTINUED TO FIGHT AGAINST LESSER WARRIORS, NEARLY ALWAYS WITH SUCCESS. BECAUSE OF HIS ABILITY TO PASS AS A NATIVE HE OFTEN PENETRATED DEEPLY INTO ENEMY TERRITORY AND LEARNED THEIR PLANS IN ADVANCE!
HE WAS WOUNDED IN 1926 AND AGAIN IN 1932; THEN DURING A HOT ENGAGEMENT WITH THE BERBERS WHILE DRAGGING IN TWO OF HIS WOUNDED MEN HE WAS SHOT THROUGH THE JAW AND NECK. FOR SAVING HIS MEN HE WAS GIVEN THE BADGE OF THE LEGION OF HONOR, A CAPTAINCY AND A CITATION FOR THE MEDAILLE MILITAIRE — (A MOST UNUSUAL HONOR, AS THIS DECORATION IS GIVEN ONLY TO ENLISTED MEN AND GENERALS).
AFTER 15 YEARS OF ACTIVE WAR SERVICE, EXCEPT FOR SHORT FURLOUGHS AND TIME OUT FOR HOSPITAL, CAPT. HAMILTON IS STILL MODEST AND STUDIOUS BUT THIS IS BELIED BY HIS ROWS OF RIBBONS FOR VALOR — — AND HE GETS ONLY $30 A MONTH!

Next Week: Angus Walters, Fisherman Skipper from Nova Scotia

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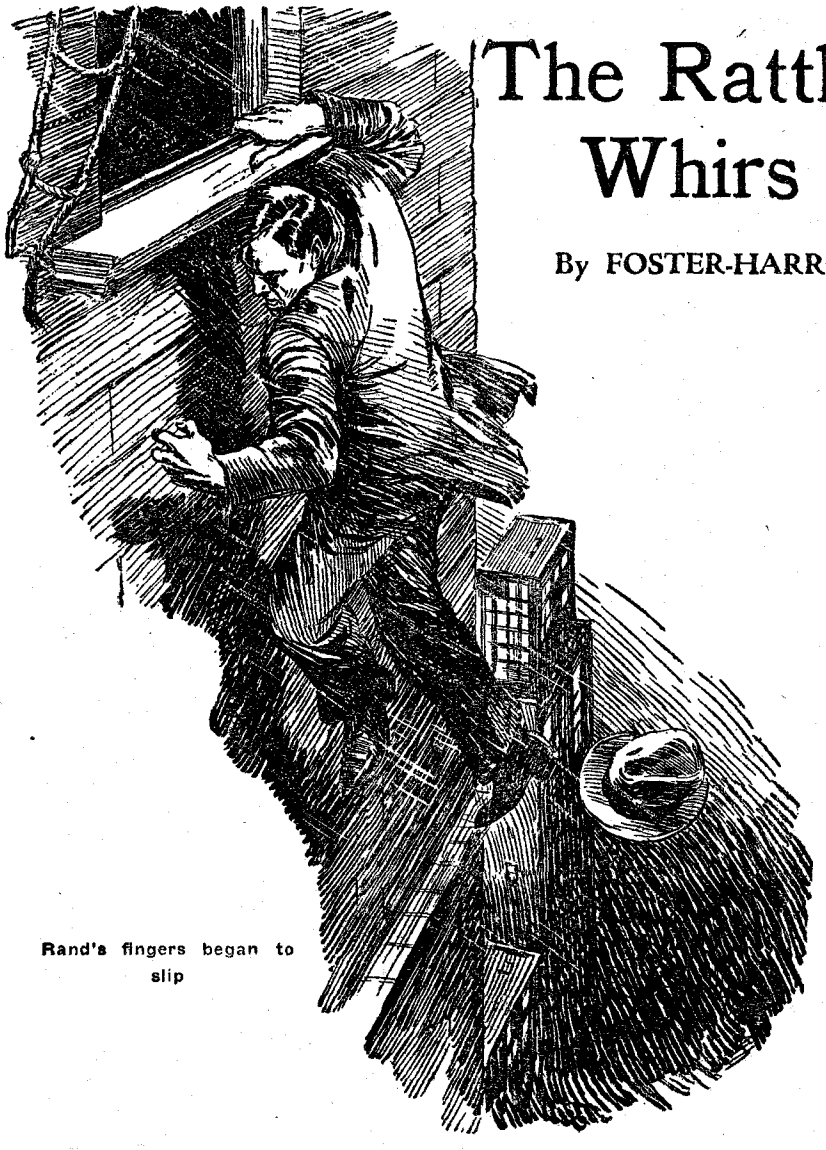
The Rattler Whirs

By FOSTER-HARRIS



Rand's fingers began to slip

High above the streets of San Antonio, Rand Robinson fights for a million dollar oil lease—and his life

PULLING the collar of his trench coat higher against the chill rain, Rand Robinson started across the platform.

Passengers from the night train scurried about him. Indifferently lighted at best, in the rain and mist the platform now was a weird, squirming tangle of lights and shadows. Yet luckily, Rand spotted his man almost at once.

Jack Hays had paused, trying to light a cigarette. His face was in shadow, but Rand could see his hands. They were shaking so badly he could not even get a match out of the box.

Somehow, even then, Rand Robinson felt a quick premonition. Jack Hays, shaking like that. Something was wrong.

He hurried toward the little oil scout

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Hays finally contrived to strike a light. His face, revealed by the sudden flare, wrenched an aghast exclamation from Robinson's lips.

"Hays! For the love of Mike, boy, what—"

With a startled, rasping gasp, Hays had dropped the match.

"Oh, uh, you, Randy?" he tried to cover his break. "Didn't know you. How you, boy? What you doing down here?"

"Barrington wired me to meet you." Rand could feel that Hays' fingers, clasped in his, were icy cold. And that expression on his face—it had looked like stark terror.

"Say, are you sick, man?" he demanded quickly.

"I, uh—no, no," denied Hays. He coughed, trying to clear the husk in his throat. "Barrington wired you to meet me? He say why?"

"No, he didn't." Rand frowned, thinking of the enigmatic telegram in his pocket. Old A. C. "Ace" Barrington, head of the Barrington Oil Corporation, might have explained why it was so "vitally important" to meet Jack Hays. But he didn't.

Rand shrugged wryly. "He just said he'd be here by plane, sometime late tonight. Told me to stick with you. I've got my car parked out here. Unless you're hungry or something, we'll go out to my diggings—"

"Rather go straight up to the office," dissented Hays. "I'm to meet Barrington there. And it's—safer."

The last word was almost a whisper. Something was wrong. Eyes narrowing, Rand started to blurt out a question, thought better of it. Hays was stooping to pick up his grip.

THE sound seemed to come from somewhere right at their feet, right below Jack Hays' downstretched hand. It was the dry, deadly whir-r of a giant rattlesnake. Unmistakable—the one sound at which everybody jumps, no matter whether they've ever heard it before or not.

With a terrified cry Jack Hays leaped six feet, crashing into a Red Cap, knocking him sprawling. Rand Robinson too involuntarily had whirled back. Others about them also had caught the blood chilling signal. A woman screamed. In an instant there was a miniature panic, people getting away from there.

Spinning, Rand jerked toward Hays as the oil scout started to sag, throwing an arm around him. Hysterically, Jack Hays was whispering one sentence, over and over.

"I can't get away from it. I can't get away from it."

"The thing strike you, man?" demanded Rand fiercely, shaking him. "Here, take a brace! Let me see—"

Hays was shaking like a leaf. But he managed to draw himself erect, pushing away Robinson's supporting arm.

"No, I'm—all right," he husked. "It hasn't touched me—yet."

Again Rand's ears caught that whispered, mystifying, last word. His freckled face twisted bewilderedly.

"You haven't got a snake in that bag or something?" he demanded. "Good Lord, I thought you hated 'em!"

"No. No, of course I haven't." Jack was regaining control. "The—the thing's under the train, I guess. I—let's get away from here, quick!"

Nodding, Rand swung. The grim warning had sounded only for an instant. But magically, it had all but cleared the whole platform in a breath. Scared faces of passengers peered down from the vestibules of the cars. Flashlights and lanterns, in the hands of trainmen, were sweeping the wet bricks, stabbing searchingly under the tracks.

A slickered brakeman cautiously turned Hays' grip over with his boot, then slid it back towards the station. Catching it up, Rand hurried the oil scout around the baggage room and out to where his battered coupé waited at the curb.

The depot, like all San Antonio's railway stations, was deep in an older, dingier part of town. And San Antonio, for an American city, is very old. It was old before the United States was born. Semi-tropic, Spanish exotic, it is a city of contrasts, modern skyscrapers right against

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ancient missions, five and tens where mail clad Conquistadores once strode; sleek motor cars in front of the Alamo. It is romantic, or—with only a change in lighting—sinister.

Tonight it was sinister. Thick clouds from the Gulf had been rolling in for hours. They hung low. The fine rain was clammy, depressing. Fingers of fog wavered through the narrow streets. The street lights seemed to emphasize the wet darkness.

WITH a shaky, rasping breath the oil scout slammed the coupé door, leaned back. Starting the motor, Rand glanced at him out of the corners of his eyes. He could see that Hays' face was drawn, taut.

As the little car slid out, purring, Hays said, "I need a drink, man. Damned bad."

Rand nodded. "Sure. Anything you want, feller. Name it." He was trying hard to make his voice lightly cheerful.

"We can drop by The Frog's place. Or Jake's—he's moved up here from Nuevo now, you know." He grinned.

Jack Hays did not answer. He was staring through the windshield at the lights of the Petroleum Tower, dominating the tall buildings of the downtown district ahead.

Off to one side from the other skyscrapers and nearly twice as high, the Petroleum Tower was a vague, slim column in the fog. Atop it, an airplane beacon burned. Barrington Oil's Southwest Texas offices occupied the entire thirtieth floor. It was not such a huge office at that, since the skyscraper stepped back, to make a thin, towering spire, as it approached its upper reaches.

With a shaky effort at a smile, Hays gestured toward the great building.

"Get me up there and I'll breathe easier. Hombre, I been in—unshirted hell."

Rand twisted the car expertly across a wet trolley rail.

"You don't have to tell me a thing," he said slowly. "But if it isn't private—well, all I know is that the old man wired me to stick tight with you. I gather something's happened."

For a moment the scout did not reply. Then he said, very slowly, "Yeah. Something has happened. That Dos Caballos wildcat ain't dry. It's a twenty or thirty thousand barrel strike."

Rand whistled amazedly. "You sure? Good Lord, man, then it'll mean a red-hot rush. We'll have to try and get in—"

"We are in." Hays lifted a twitching hand toward his mouth. "If nothing happens to me before the old man gets here—Barrington Oil's got the cream of the field. They killed old Joe Hickman. But before they did I got a lease from him on his whole ranch. Eighteen thousand acres solid, covering almost the whole structure. It's worth a million bucks—"

"We've got it if nothing happens to you?" Rand interrupted, puzzled. "I don't get you. What you think—"

"You heard that damn rattlesnake, didn't you?" Hays' voice whirled up, almost to the high pitch of hysteria. "Sure you did. It wasn't just my imagination. You heard it too.

"Well, I been hearing the damned thing, off and on, for hours. Last night they all but cut my throat. They're after that lease. Trying to make me tell. I know it's a rigged job, but, my God, man, snakes are the one thing I've been scared to death of all my life.

"And I don't know who to trust. I think there's at least one traitor right here in our own outfit. Somebody that knows how to get me. I—I—"

He was stammering incoherently. With a sharp effort he clamped his jaw shut, turned his head away. Eyes wide, Rand started to blurt out a question.

Instead, immediately he thought better of it. Quickening the car's gait, he held silence until he had drawn up at the curb before The Frog's Place, smart rendezvous for San Antonio's night life.

THE Frog's, as usual, was crowded. With relaxing dry laws it had added liquors and a bar to its French cuisine. Winter tourists, the army set from the numerous flying fields about the city,

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oil operators, cattlemen and what not thronged the tables.

Leading the way directly to the bar, Jack Hays ordered Scotch. Contenting himself with a beer, Rand watched him covertly. His puzzled amaze and the clammy feel of paralyzing terror he had caught from the little scout continued to grow.

He had never before known Hays to take a drink. But now the little oil man gulped two glasses of straight Scotch in quick succession and started to pour himself a third. His eyes, haggard, a little wild, roved the room constantly. The muscles of his face twitched. He looked like a man on the verge of complete collapse.

The liquor seemed to have no effect on him whatever. Abruptly he shoved back the bottle, fumbling inside his coat for his wallet. "Come on," he muttered. "Let's go. Let's get out of here."

"I'll get it." Rand tossed a bill on the wet mahogany, signalling the bartender. As Hays' twitching hands had struggled with his coat, inadvertently he had revealed that he was carrying a gun under his left armpit. And there again was something ominous. Never before had Rand known Hays to pack a weapon, not even on thug-infested, boom oilfield roads.

He was conscious of the way Jack's glance swept and reswept every foot of the ground about them as they went back out to the car. Unlocking the door, he helped the scout in, then went around to the other side and climbed in himself.

"It—it's pitiful, to be so damned scared of anything." Jack grimaced. "Especially when I know it's just a rigged scare. But —rattlers— I hate 'em!"

He shuddered. His voice was crawling with horror as it went on.

"When I was just a kid, just four, my mother left me locked in on a screen porch. I was playing. I heard a kind of rustle and turned around and there was a rattlesnake crawling in. A big one. I knew what it was. I couldn't get out. Couldn't get away. When I yelled the thing coiled and rattled. They point their heads right at you, you know, and sort of sway—"

In the silence Rand too could visualize that scene memory was bringing back to the scout. The terror of it, the searing horror.

"Mother didn't hear me. Every time I'd move or even start to cry, the thing would whir. It was maybe half an hour before anybody found out what was happening. I've never forgotten."

With an explosive jerking of strained muscles, the little scout beat a fist into his palm.

"And whoever's doing this knows that's my own, personal horror. Trying to scare me silly, find out what I did with that lease. Well, they'll not find out. I'm not telling anybody, not even you!"

"You don't have to," said Rand soothingly. "Calm down, guy. Barrington will be here before midnight, sure. We'll go get a cop to wait with us, if you want to."

Hays shook his head. "No. Let's get up to the office. That'll be enough. Let's get on up there, quick."

After a minute he added awkwardly. "I —don't get offended at me, Randy. I just got the big jitters. Got 'em bad."

HE said no more until Rand had swung the car into the parking lot across the street from the Petroleum Tower and they were getting out. Then he glanced up through the boiling fog at the great air beacon, blazing high above them.

"Bad night," he said huskily. "If he can just get through this soup, though, it oughtn't to take the old man long to come just from Dallas."

Rand nodded, then suddenly frowned. "Dallas?" he questioned. "Why, Barrington was in Kansas City when he wired me this evening. What gave you the idea—"

He broke off. Already starting toward the building, Hays had not heard. Eyes narrowing, Rand hesitated an instant, then reached quickly into the car, slipping a pistol from the car pocket into that of his coat. Turning, he took his check from the sleepy parking yard attendant and hurried after the scout.

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A moment later the one elevator man on night duty was delivering them on the thirtieth floor, yawning drowsily.

"Anybody else come up here tonight?" Hays demanded nervously. The elevator man shook his head. "Not to here," he denied. "Dull night."

"Well, we're expecting Mr. Barrington sometime this evening. Don't bring anybody else up unless they phone first. Understand?"

The elevator operator nodded. "Sure thing. I gotcha."

Rand had snapped on the floor lights. As the elevator door thudded softly shut, he turned, smiling.

"Now you're okay, ain't you, boy?" he asked. "Thirty stories up on a private floor. Staircase locked off. Snug enough?"

Jack Hays did not answer. The whole floor being given over to one company's quarters, the elevators opened directly into the general office. Over to the right were several smaller offices, including a map room and the private sanctum of Ben Swalley, company vice president in charge of this division.

Nervously, with Rand trailing at his heels, the little scout looked through all the offices before settling down on the cushions in Swalley's quarters. He left the door open so that he could watch the elevators and staircase doors. And as he unbuttoned his coat, digging out a crumpled pack of cigarettes, Rand noted again the gun under his left arm. It was a .45 automatic.

Despite the chill, rainy night the closed room seemed curiously musty, hot. Turning, Rand threw open a window, standing for a moment, glancing casually down. Thirty stories down and perhaps 75 feet to his left he could see the rain shrouded lights of the St. Joseph Street bridge. Directly below, in an unfathomable cañon of darkness, was the San Antonio River, paralleling the side of the building, separated from it only by a narrow sidewalk and balustrade.

It was raining harder now. A queer, sobering something tugging at his mind, Rand turned. Jack Hays was crouching in his chair, hand near his gun. His bloodshot eyes were never still an instant. Terror, a desperate uneasiness flickered in their depths. Despite himself, Rand caught the clammy, contagious grip of it.

With an effort, he shrugged.

Why, nothing was going to happen. They were safe up here. In an hour or so Ace Barrington would arrive, either by plane or car. Jack Hays was simply overwrought. But still . . .

The idea that anything could so work up the usually steel nerved little scout in itself was disquieting. And it wasn't all imagination. Rand too had heard that rattler whirring.

Instinctively, his hand slid down to his own pistol. The touch was oddly comforting.

Despite his curiosity, tactfully he did not try to pump the scout. But Hays simply could not keep still. Disconnectedly, bit by bit, he spilled details until Rand could put together a rough picture.

PLAYING one of his uncanny hunches, whose accuracy had made old Ace Barrington give him almost unlimited authority to close quick deals, Hays had bought the Joe Hickman lease. He had done so right at the moment when the lightly regarded Dos Caballos wildcat well had seemed dry, and straight in the face of his superior, Ben Swalley's order to let it alone.

Within three hours after he had closed the deal, the "hopeless" wildcat had started belching oil. Hays had won again on a long gambling chance. For a pittance he had bought his company a lease worth at least a million. That had been Saturday afternoon.

With no thought of anybody trying to steal the signed and acknowledged lease paper itself—ordinarily it would have been valueless to anyone save the rightful owners—Hays simply had pocketed it. He had taken the notary out with him to the ranch. When the notary had decided to stay and watch the well a while longer, Hays had come back to town alone, about dark.

Palmas, the nearest town, thirty miles

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from the well, was little more than a cattle pen siding. But it did have a hotel, owned by Ben Flanner, a hard case character who owned or ran pretty nearly everything else in the county too. Working over his papers in one of the hostelry's dingy rooms, Hays accidentally dropped the lease into the waste basket.

As it proved, this carelessness was amazingly fortunate. Dog tired, he went to sleep without noticing that the paper was misplaced. And sometime shortly before morning he was awakened by stealthy movements in the room.

When he would have leaped out of bed a great hand slammed him back and a razor edged knife dropped coldly across his throat.

A snarling whisper said, "Lie still! Or I'll cut your throat."

Hays lay still. There was death in that darkness, very close. Someone with a flashlight was going over his papers on the table.

"It's not here." With an angry snarl, this shadowy intruder turned. "Hays, damn you, where's that Hickman lease?"

The shock of what they were after was the stunning surprise. The lease—thinking fast, Hays gulped, then spat out defiant answer.

"In the mails, you rats! I mailed it in. You're out of luck."

"You're a liar!" rasped the man by the table. "The postoffice wasn't open when you got in. You wouldn't have mailed it unregistered!"

"Aw, he might have," spoke up the knifeman. "But what if he did? That's all right, he'll have sent it in to—"

"Shut up!" crackled the other man furiously. "He didn't mail it. He's got it hid somewheres. We'll find it, or—"

In a savage passion he went through Hays' clothing and all but tore his grip and briefcase apart. Baffled, he came toward the bed.

"Let him have a feel of that slicer," he ordered. "Hays, you tell where that lease is, or we'll kill you."

"I told you I mailed it." Desperately, Jack stuck to his story. He realized now they simply were overlooking the document on the table. But he sensed also that if he did surrender it, they were much more likely to kill him than if he did not.

Just what they would have done next was uncertain. They began a debate, in angry whispers. The knife, sawing coldly across Hays' gullet, lifted slightly. And he took lightning advantage.

Throwing himself toward the opposite side of the bed, in a headlong, somersaulting dive he plunged for the open window. A chair sent him sprawling. A yell bubbling in his throat, he tried wildly to regain his feet. He heard a sharp, "Scram!" and the thud of a door.

ALARMED by his outcry, not even trying to attack him, the two invaders had fled as they had come, through a supposedly barred door between Jack's room and that adjoining.

Breathing hard, Hays snapped on the light and slammed a dresser across that door. Apparently no one else as yet had been aroused by the disturbance. Jamming a chair under the knob of the hall door, he whirled toward the table.

Then seconds' frantic search revealed the lease, simply misplaced, just as he had suspected. Ramming it into his undershirt he turned. The implications of it all were racing through his brain in a grim, flashing train.

With no definite reason, he had a suspicion that one of the intruders had been Ben Flanner, owner of this hotel and kingpin who virtually ruled this part of Texas. But regardless of that, the mere fact that the invaders had been after the lease document spoke deadly clear.

The lease as yet, naturally, was not on record. Only Jack, old Hickman and the notary had been present when it was signed. As he had ample authority to do, Hays had paid with the usual imaginary dollar down and a draft on Barrington Oil for the remainder.

Now, if Hickman and the notary were dead, or suddenly determined to play

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crooked, only Hays' word and the signed and acknowledged lease paper itself remained to prove any deal had been made. Should the lease document be stolen and Jack's mouth permanently closed, then Barrington Oil would be "out"—and somebody else "in"—a prize worth a million dollars, maybe a lot more.

Too, the significance of that broken, careless statement the knife man had uttered was disturbing. "That's all right," the knife wielder had said about Jack's claim of having mailed the document. "He'll have sent it to—"

As a matter of course, if Hays had mailed the document, he would have sent it to the San Antonio office. Now what else could the knife man's statement mean but that he knew this? And since it was "all right," would he have a confederate in the Barrington forces? In other words somebody in this San Antonio office who could and would steal the lease out of the incoming mail?

Hays slept no more that night. In the gray dawn of early Sunday morning he heard an excited cowman telling the news. The charred bodies of old Hickman and the notary had been found under the rancher's burned car. An accident, the cowman said. But it hadn't been, Hays knew. It had been murder. Murder in a deadly game for a gigantic stake.

Suspecting Ben Flanner and being right here in Flanner's stronghold, Jack trusted nobody. He had gotten hold of a gun. The night before he had wired the San Antonio office that he had bought the Hickman lease. Now came an urchin from the depot, with an answering wire, from Dallas, signed "Barrington."

"Your wire to me," it read. "Bully. But something rotten down there. Keep shut mouth, head for San Antonio, deliver papers to me personally in office tonight. Don't fail."

It was exactly what Jack intended doing anyway. Blindly loyal to Barrington, he obeyed now without question. But as a precaution, he took the train instead of trying to drive through. On the way, dropping off to get a sandwich, he had also sent another wire acknowledging receipt of the old man's order.

In the station at Palmas, on the train in in the washroom, again and again he had heard, or thought he heard, the whir of a rattler.

Eyes narrowing, Rand caught at that detail about telegrams.

"You got a wire signed Barrington, from Dallas? Barrington hasn't been in Dallas for at least a week."

"It was from Dallas," insisted Hays.

"It must have been a fake. To make you keep your mouth shut and—"

BREATH rasping, he broke off. With a click the door to the adjoining room, the map room, had swung open. Before he could move a muscle, from somewhere in that room came a blood chilling, deadly sound, the whir of a giant rattler.

Screaming, Jack Hays whipped to his feet, crushing the cigarette packet, hurling it toward the cuspidor, then pointing wildly. His other hand clawed inside his coat for his gun. Before he could get it out the room shook with the snarling thunder of Rand's Colt as he fired two quick shots at the reptile in the doorway.

Head gone in a bloody pulp, the great snake whipped and threshed in hideous, blood spouting tangles. It was a rattler, its body almost as thick as a man's arm.

The little oil scout was kneeling atop the desk. Face gray with horror, he looked at Rand. His voice was a shaking wraith.

"Well, you—think that's—fake too?"

Silent, gun leveled, deadly tense, Rand was crouched, watching that door. Rattlesnakes don't crawl of their own accord up thirty stories in skyscrapers. And this one—the fact beat across his brain—this one had no rattle. Although he had heard the dry, deadly whir distinctly, this snake's buttons were missing.

It was raining hard outside now and blowing. Wet, clammy air drove coldly against his back from the open window behind him. He had taken off his trench coat. Unconsciously he still held it.

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The map room was silent now. The lights were on in there, as in every office on the floor. He and Hays had looked in there, had searched every room and had found nobody.

Nevertheless someone was in that map room now. Somebody had thrown or pushed that snake through the door. The Barrington offices were a trap. Somebody was trying to use terror to pry from Jack Hays the secret of what he had done with that lease. The facts fitted no other explanation.

Lips curled back in a fighting snarl, Rand flung a snapping, whispered order at Hays. "Get that gun out! We're going to have a fight. Forget the snake, watch that door for men!"

He saw Jack wrench his weapon free and swing it level, uncocked. Before he could snarl at him to correct the error, Hades broke.

The lights went out. Simultaneously, seeming to charge the whole blackness with its paralyzing horror, came again the burr of a giant rattler. Jack Hays screamed, an awful, choking cry.

The deadly signal might have been coming from anywhere. Involuntarily, Rand jerked back. More powerful even than will, the instinctive revulsion of scores of generations tore at him. Generations that had hated and feared the snake as the Fiend himself.

Momentarily he was stone blind from the sudden transition from light to inky dark. In that instant, despite his realization that this was all a hideously feasome but still a man-made game, Rand nevertheless knew some of the horror that must be Jack Hays'.

The whir broke short. A flat, tenseless voice spoke. "You ain't needed, Robinson. Here's your ticket. Take it."

From the darkness spat bellowing flame.

TOO late Rand realized that he was standing against the window, skylined. He started to hurl himself sideways, to shoot at the map room door. He tripped.

From his other side, the other doorway, the stabbing gun flames seemed to reach out like a tremendous arm, dealing him a staggering, shoving blow. He pitched back, felt the window ledge against the back of his knees—with a scream knew he was going out.

His right hand caught the rain-wet edge of the window channel and slipped. His left found no purchase at all. For a split instant of supreme horror he knew that he hung by one hand from the wet, slimy edge, that wind and rain beat at him, that thirty stories below his threshing feet was the concrete, the black, shallow waters of the river.

His fingers were slipping. Something in the wind, something rough, wet and cold slapped against his free hand, fighting wildly to find a grip on something beside empty air, anything. Like a drowning man catching at a straw, his hand gripped it, clenched hard.

His hold on the ledge broke. He dropped, brought up with a savage jerk that all but wrenched his arm out of its socket. Battered mercilessly against the building side, he swung in an arc. Then his other hand also found hold beside its fellow.

The "straw" that had saved him was a light rope ladder, dangling from a window of the thirty-first floor. Apparently, with cold nerve, the invaders had used it to enter the Barrington map room. He had caught the lowermost rung.

Only vaguely was he aware of the blacker shadow of a man's head and shoulders, thrust out of the window from which he had fallen. Thin and far away, he heard the man's horrified shout.

"My God! He's gone! All the way down, into the river!"

"That's fine!" A gasping, screaming voice answered. "Nobody'll notice—Help me with this hellion! Help—"

The cry broke short. The silhouetted head and shoulders jerked back. A terrific struggle was going on up there in the office. The little oil scout was putting up a battle. But why hadn't he fired? Hadn't he ever remembered to cock that automatic?

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Rand Robinson was too much occupied with his own still deadly perilous situation to waste any time wondering. Something warm and sticky—it must be blood—was mixing with the cold rain across his face. The reeling, empty space below pulled at him like a ton of lead.

Could he draw himself up? If he couldn't, very shortly his hold, death grip though it was, must break. Or one of those killers up there might look out again, spy him this time and help him finish his journey down. He had to pull up!

It would have been an easy feat, ordinarily. But now, badly dazed, wounded, it was the hardest trick Rand Robinson had attempted in his life.

Legs threshing wildly, he put everything he had into the effort. For a moment he was upside down. Burning, blinding fluid was filling his eyes, his own blood. Like a blurred snatch of flickering, badly focussed movie film he saw the glistening concrete, the inky cañon of the river, thirty stories below. Waist deep water—he would splatter like an egg hitting steel.

Then he had righted himself. Sobbing for breath, fighting savagely just to stay conscious, he was on the bottom rung of the ladder.

IT took him an appreciable time to muster his inner forces and go on up to the open map room window. The big bullet that had scraped his temple had pounded a terrific amount of brute force into his skull and brain. Again, again and again an illimitable tide of blackness, inside his head as well as out, tried to pull him down.

Dogged, indomitable, his will stemmed it back. He went on. The window seemed to yawn slowly, to reach languidly toward him with a wide, gaping mouth. Burning his last bit of strength he pulled into it, knew he was sliding over the wet sill and softly down, head first, to the carpeted floor. . . .

He never was completely out. But for perhaps a minute, perhaps several minutes, he was something approximating punch drunk. Hardly breathing, he lay as he had dropped. The horror of what he had come through still plucked at him. But it was weirdly unreal now, like a terrifying nightmare which seems to hold you helpless, but which, right at the time, you realize is just a dream.

The lashing whir of a rattler jerked him out of it. Swaying drunkenly, he came up to his knees. The deadly burring was coming from the other room, the office. No sound of struggle in there now. They had little Jack Hays. Something was happening—torture—

A dim, ghastly flickering of light was seeping through the half-open, connecting door. Abruptly, the reptilian warning stopped. A harsh voice spoke curtly.

"Ain't on him anywheres, boss. Or in his bag."

The flat, toneless voice that had issued Rand's death warrant answered.

"He'll tell what he did with it. We heard all you told Robinson, Hays. You didn't mail that lease. You got it hid somewheres. You'll tell—"

Abruptly, the voice no longer droned. It was a gurgling scream, insane, the quintessence of evil.

"Look up, Hays! Look, damn you! Now tell! Or you get it right in the face or throat! Tell!"

Jack Hays' gasping, broken cry ringing in his ears, Rand Robinson swayed forward. His lips twisted in a fighting snarl. He was weaponless, wounded, still half-dazed. They were at least two to his one, and armed. But they were torturing Hays. He must do something, use his wits, smash them.

His groping hands suddenly found weapons. On the shelves lining the room were dozens of sample sacks. Small canvas bags, filled with heavy sand or other rock formation specimens from wells, they were excellent impromptu sandbags, skull rappers.

He came abreast the office doorway. Crouching, he stared, what he saw filling him at once with a thick horror and a mad, fighting rage.

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The thing was like a Doré illustration of the torture of a damned soul in black hell. A hand-masked flashlight made a dim globe of light above the desk. On that desk, spreadeagled and apparently strapped down, the little oil scout lay, face upward.

Above him, directly over his face, was a giant, lashing rattler.

Suspended by a wire or cord and irritated to maddened fury, the huge reptile twisted and whipped. The venomous head licked down, again and again, scant inches from Hays' staring eyes. The thick tail beat savagely across his desperate mouth.

The toneless voice spoke.

"All we've got to do is let him down, Hays. Just dip this pole a little. He'll get you in the face or throat. Right where it'll reach your heart and brain quick. You'll die in agony.

"Better spill the truth, quick."

STEMMING back a furious impulse to drive recklessly in, Rand stretched his eyelids wide, straining to locate the men in the office. He would have only the advantage of surprise. He must make it count. And not let that rattler drop on Hays, either.

The man speaking was easy enough to spot. Holding the light, he was on the other side of the desk. But the second man, handling the pole from whose end dangled the snake—where was he?

Rand slid forward. The second man was right beside the door, just a sharper, blacker shadow. Perhaps he heard or sensed Robinson's approach, for he started to turn. Like an exploding shell, Rand went into action.

The heavy bag in his right hand, he rifled at the man holding the light. Simultaneously, with the same whipping motion, he came about, transferring the bag in his left hand to his right, putting every ounce of his strength into a chopping, slugging blow.

The heavy canvas took the pole holder somewhere on the head. Probably he never knew what hit him. With a stricken grunt he started to sag. Instantly Rand had ripped the pole out of his hands and was snapping its hideous burden toward the second man.

This one, on the other side of the desk, either had been hit and knocked back by the thrown sandbag, or had jerked back. He had dropped the flashlight. Still burning, it had fallen under the desk, its beam directed against his feet. Reeling back with a wild scream as the snake struck him, he now started shooting.

Screaming, he ducked and dodged, pulling trigger so fast that the spurting flashes, the roaring detonations, all but blended.

Hurtling himself frantically to the right, away from the door, Rand dropped to his knees. The pole in his grip was perhaps seven or eight feet long. With the great, heavy snake dangling from the yard-long cord at the end it was an awkward and a horribly dangerous weapon. Almost as dangerous to Rand as to the terror crazed gunman. But there was no time, no chance to find anything else.

Whirling the thing like a heavy whip, Rand slashed at the reeling, flame-spouting shadow of the gunman. The room was a roaring madhouse, a blazing, gibbering, horror crammed piece of the Pit.

Either the cord or the pole broke. The weight of the reptile suddenly was gone from the end. The black shadow of the gunman came at him in a plunging leap. Desperately he tried to foreshorten the pole, to use it as a spear. The thing broke. The gunman came into him with a stunning crash. Back they went and down, rolling over and over. From somewhere right beside them the angry whir of a rattler lifted, sibilant, infinitely deadly.

Locked breast to breast with a maniac, fighting like a fiend to hold him, Rand fended off a murderously flailing pistol barrel. The fellow was battling with the strength of two men, trying to get away. Again he tried to slug with the gun.

This time Rand's frantic fingers caught the hot barrel. With a terrific effort he wrenched it around and down, trying to rip the weapon out of the other man's grasp. Roaring flame, a cannon blast, exploded right in his face.

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Half blinded, cheeks stinging intolerably from the powder, he felt his man give a stricken jerk, then go limp. Tearing the pistol free, he jerked back, rolling up to his knees, leveling the gun.

But it was needless. It was all over. Somewhere on the floor the rattler still whirred. But the big gunman was down, on his face, quiet, not three feet from his unconscious companion.

In the reflected glare from the flashlight under the desk Rand could see them both quite plainly. Blood was starting to flow from the big gunman's throat. He was dead, certainly.

BREATH coming in a sobbing gasp, Rand Robinson got to his feet, swaying back. Little Jack Hays lay motionless, atop the desk. But before Rand moved about in this horror filled office any more he wanted light and plenty of it.

The invaders, he judged, must have snapped off the lights at the master switch beside the elevator. Whirling, at a shambling run he started across the general office to turn them back on. He saw the red flash signal of the elevator car coming up. Teeth bared in a fighting snarl, again he flung the gun level. And then, an instant later, leaped forward with a broken, relieved cry.

It was the old man himself, Ace Barrington. Behind him was big Frank Donohue, his pilot. They came quickly out of the lighted elevator, Barrington fumbling for the switch, Donohue already drawing a gun.

"Randy!" Barrington's cry seemed strangely thin and far away. "You're covered with blood! What the devil—"

Waveringly, Rand Robinson tried to grin.

"We've just been sampling a little home made hell," he said thickly. "Torture. Get in there—help Hays—"

The room was reeling. He knew that Barrington leaped forward, caught him. Once again his will alone kept him from passing completely out. But the next few moments always would remain vague in his memory, hazy, unreal.

Vaguely, he would remember the big air pilot leaping back from the office door, his gun pumping lead into an already badly battered snake. He would recall Barrington stooping over the silent figures, jerking erect again with an odd, clipped exclamation.

"Ben Flanner! And—and Swalley! My own V. P.! Was—was he—"

Big Frank Donohue was loosening the unconscious Hays. He leaped back as the faint burr of a rattlesnake sounded near his feet. Stooping, he picked up something and turned.

"Look here!" he sputtered bewilderedly. "A door bell buzzer with a rattler's button, tied on the clapper. And that stick and loop there— Randy, what the hell were they doing to you two?"

"Ageing us plenty," answered Rand grimly. "That buzzer outfit was their sound effect, I guess. Couldn't have been a real snake whirring, every time. But that sidewinder in that loop—"

Disjointedly, he spilled out the story, what Hays had told him, what had happened. As he finished, old Barrington swore dazedly.

"I knew there was something plenty rotten when the Dallas office forwarded me that wire from Jack," he commented. "Answering one I hadn't sent. That's why I wired you and got busy. Whoever was shadowing Jack on that train must have missed seeing him when he sent that second wire.

"Or maybe just depended on me not getting it until Monday, too late."

He shook his head, busily examining the little scout.

"Out cold," he announced. "Doesn't seem to have been bitten anywhere, though. Probably just shock. Frank, hit a phone and get a doc, quick. Better call the cops, too.

"Uh—wait a minute, though, on those cops."

Frowning, Barrington swung. Rand's head was clearing a little now. He wiped a sleeve across his eyes, trying to brush away haze.

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"Jack didn't tell you what he did with that lease?" Old Ace Barrington's voice was slightly worried. "After all, man, it's a million dollar prize. And still floating around loose—"

"Jack didn't tell me," interrupted Rand Robinson slowly. "But—well, maybe I can guess."

Waveringly, he got to his feet. Stooping, he retrieved the crumpled cigarette packet the oil scout had flung at the cuspidor. Unfolding it carefully, he looked up with a sudden grin.

"Here it is. I thought it was kind of odd Jack would take time to throw this away before going for his gun."

"Good Lord!" said Barrington weakly. "A million dollars—in the spittoon!"

"Well, the waste basket served once," grinned Rand weakly. "Scared or not, I guess Jack figured the cuspidor ought to do just as well."

THE END

America's Vanished Sea

SOME years ago the Colorado River broke into a Southern California desert and formed a salt sea of several hundred square miles area, flooding out railroads and salt mines. The new body of water was so large it was expected to change the climate of the entire southwest; but within two or three years the Salton Sea had shrunk to a mere salty lake.

—*Delos White.*

Russia's Burning Temple

NEAR Baku on the Caspian Sea there is reported to stand an ancient stone temple which is literally enveloped in a sheet of fire. Flames issue from the dome, from holes and cracks along the walls, at the entrance, at the tops of carved columns, in the sacred courtyard. Between slabs of the stone floor are cracks through which flames can be seen below.

The temple is used by an ancient sect of Persian fire-worshipers, and the eternal flames are held in religious awe. Natural gas wells are the explanation.

—*Carl C. Mellor.*

The Husband Who Never Goes Out

IN the Mediterranean Sea lives a green worm called Bonellia Viridis. She carries her microscopic husband concealed within her body. Mr. B. Viridis lives and dies without escaping!

—*T. T. Rockel.*

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Bed Rock

By BORDEN CHASE

Rugged men of courage battle the elements—and each other—in dangerous cylinders of compressed air

LEADING UP TO THIS INSTALLMENT

AN independent group of sand hogs under the leadership of Terry Braid are engaged in sinking cylinders for a skyscraper foundation in lower Manhattan. Having started out with their own capital, every construction company in the city is out to blacklist the men who are working for Terry. But the J. P. Cotello Company resorts to stronger measures and attempts to put their air compressor, most vital of the sand hogger's machinery, out of commission. But Cotello's underhandedness is unsuccessful.

A few days after the work has begun, Terry's old friend, Duke Corey, puts in his appearance and asks for a place working on this latest venture of the sand hogs. Corey takes him on, but makes the mistake of introducing him to his attractive and charming lady friend, Fay Morley. She immediately shows an interest in Duke, and there is no mistaking her fondness for him when she emotionally greets Duke — after he and Terry had narrowly escaped death when quicksand had rushed into the cylinder in which they had been working.

They forced their bodies to accept this unnatural condition

This story began in the Argosy for August 17

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CHAPTER IV *(Continued).*

TROUBLE IN THE CYLINDER.

"HELLO, Terry," he said. "You don't kill easy, do you?"

"Aren't we dead?"

Duke laughed and struggled to his feet. He slipped one arm beneath his friend's shoulders and drew him erect. At length he located the ladder.

"Think you can climb?" he asked.

THE whine of escaping pressure lessened and soon stopped. The iron door above them released with a sucking sound and dropped inward on its hinges. Daylight poured into the lock, blinding both men with its sudden brightness. They heard shouts and laughter at the top of the tube and saw the faces of the gang.

"Would you like to see the sky?" asked Duke.

"One side, my son!" said Terry, and started up the ladder.

Matt McCarthy was holding Fay in his great arms as though she were a child when she opened her eyes. A large blue handkerchief, saturated with water that trickled down her face, was folded across her forehead.

She twisted her head to look up into his eyes and for a moment she was bewildered. Recognition brought a spasm of fear.

"Matt," she cried, "is he—"

"Sure, me darlin'," laughed Matt, as he set her lightly upon her feet. "He's bright as a daisy. Look at him—you can't kill Terry Braid."

"But Duke—where's Duke?"

"Squattin' alongside the other loafer, though I'm blessed if I know why you're worried about him. Or have you a fondness for all sand hogs?"

"Does he know I'm here, Matt?"

"He does *not*. Faith, now, neither of them boys is in condition to be meetin' a girl like yourself. They're practically naked."

"Idiot!" said Fay, and ran toward Duke.

"The darlin'," said Matt, and scratched dubiously at the stubble on his chin. "Sure, she's all mixed up."

Both men were stretched out upon a pile of clothing that had been hastily gathered by the sand hogs. Terry lay flat upon his chest, his arms folded beneath his forehead, while one of the men cleaned sand from the cuts in his shoulders.

Next to him Duke sprawled upon his back, arms flung wide and chest heaving as he gulped in the fresh air. His eyes opened wide in astonishment when he turned to find Fay kneeling beside him.

"Are you all right, Duke?" she asked.

"Where did *you* come from?" he said.

"I've been here all afternoon. But you—are you hurt?"

"No, he's not hurt," said Duke awkwardly. "Terry's got a few scratches, but he's used to that."

"This is me, over here," said Terry, a wry smile on his face as he lifted it to look at Fay. "Haven't we met somewhere before?"

"How can you laugh now?" asked Fay. "A moment ago I thought—"

"You thought you weren't going to see Duke again," said Terry. "That's what I'm laughing at. Say—a fellow can laugh when the joke's on him, can't he?"

"I don't know what you mean," said Fay quietly. "I never expected to see either of you again."

"Not a bad idea," laughed Terry.

"Hold it, Terry," said Duke. "I

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don't know what you two are squabbling about, and I don't care much." He turned to face Fay, and his lips were tight against his teeth. "This is hardly a place for you, and I'd appreciate it if you'd meet Terry after working hours. You see, we have twenty cylinders to sink, and women have a way of bringing hard luck to a job. Now, would you mind running along like a good little girl and finishing your argument later this evening?"

FAY rose from her knees, brushed the sand from her skirt, and walked to the ladder leading up from the excavation. Matt McCarthy, a puzzled frown crowding a myriad wrinkles about his eyes, helped her up to the street level.

He opened the door of her car, stood silently until she had seated herself, and grinned.

"And now where?" he asked.

"Home!" she snapped. "Where I belong."

"'Tis a grand idea, but you'll be needin' a bit of gas to get there. And what with a hole in the tank—"

"Damn," she said.

"That's a good word, but it won't fill the gas tank," he grinned.

She fumbled through her purse, located her card and handed it to Matt. "You used the gas—you get the car home," she said, and hailed a passing taxi.

Before McCarthy was quite aware of what was happening she had stepped from the car and was giving her address to the taxi driver. Matt scratched once again at his chin, glanced at the card, and waved a huge paw at the girl.

"When?" he shouted.

"Tonight," she answered. "I want to have a talk with you."

"Will there be a cold bottle of beer?"

"Dozens of them," she laughed, and the taxi was gone.

He nodded his head slowly and returned to the excavation. Duke and Terry were up now, and Duke was ordering a change to be made in the bracing of the cylinder. Big Swede and Scotty had climbed down into the lock, and buckets of sand were coming up the long tube. Terry, with a group of sand hogs, was removing the wooden platform erected on the rim of the cylinder, and soon he signaled to the hoist engineer to bring another section down from the street.

There had been no words about Fay. Each had dismissed the incident as though it had not occurred. But Duke was worried. There was no doubt in his mind that Fay had intentionally come to him and ignored Terry. And this thought gave rise to a flood of conflicting emotions. Why had she done it? There was no conceit in Duke Corey—he put a small valuation upon himself as a ladies' man.

Whatever success he had had with women he attributed to free-handed spending. Traveling to the far corners of the earth as a sand hog, his contacts had been confined to girls who would welcome a stranger with money to spend.

A girl like Fay Morley puzzled him. Obviously she liked Terry Braid or she would not have flown north with him. Why, then, had she shown such interest in Duke when they met? Had she seen something in his eyes? Were his emotions so apparent? For his part, he knew definitely that he was in love with her.

Why? There was no reason—it was one of those things that happened and about which nothing could be done.

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But he was equally sure Fay would never know it.

CHAPTER V.

PARK AVENUE PALS.

BIG SWEDE and Scotty had climbed out of the pit, and another twenty foot section of tube dangled from the hoist cable. Now they were about to perform one of the most delicate of all the operations in the sinking of a cylinder.

One section was in place and had been started on its way down to bed rock. Two heavy hose lines led over the top edge of the tube to the chambers below. Through one of these surged a constant flow of pressure that must be maintained to keep the cylinder from flooding. The other was slack—no air flowed through it, but it was still hooked onto the lock.

Duke lowered himself to the roof of the lock and loosened the slack hose. It was hoisted aloft and passed through the section that dangled above the pit. When the end came twisting down to him, Duke refastened it to the intake pipe and signalled for pressure. The hose leaped into life beneath the thrust of the air, whipping back and forth against the walls of the pit.

"That's good," cried Duke. "Kill the pressure on the other line. Make it fast, you monkeys—we're going places."

When this line went slack Duke quickly unhooked it and signalled for it to be drawn up. It, too, was passed through the new section of tube and attached to the lock. Now, at a word from Duke, the new section of tube was slowly lowered to meet the upper lip of the cylinder already in place.

Hopper and Muldoon clambered down the sides of the pit and with the help of Duke bolted the sections together. New timbers were set in place to form a framework around the lengthened column, and the second step of the work had been completed.

"How about you, Terry?" called Duke as he leaned above the rim of the cylinder. "Ready for another trip below?"

"Not if I get the same welcome when I come out," said Terry.

"Ah, forget it," laughed Duke. "She was all upset and so were you. Take her to dinner tonight and you'll be chasing after a marriage license tomorrow. Besides—we're sinking cylinders."

He cuffed Terry on the ear, grinned, and turned to look for McCarthy.

"Hey, Irishman," he called. "Do you keep the air coming this time, or do I take you apart?"

"Truth, an' I was just about to tell ye about that," said Matt. "What with all this divilment goin' on, I'd feel better if we had a spare compressor workin'. Yes, Duke, me son, I'm afraid we'll have to have another machine. Is there enough money in the sock to rent one?"

"That's out. We were flat broke this morning, and Terry's share will just be enough for emergencies."

"Saints above!" shouted Matt. "And wouldn't ye be callin' this an imergincy?"

"G'wan," laughed Duke. "That was just a dip in the lake, eh, Terry?"

Terry Braid said nothing. He was standing at the rim of the pit watching Muldoon and Hopper tightening bolts that held the sections together. He realized Duke had tried to dismiss Fay's actions with a laugh. It was the sort of thing a fellow like Duke would do. Duke was too good a friend—too

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much the man's man to do anything else.

He was a grand guy, thought Terry. There were none better. And as he told himself these things he smiled. Was any woman worth breaking up a friendship like theirs? Was Fay worth it? A hundred Fays? He hooked an arm about Duke's neck.

"Come on, slave driver," he said. "Let's go down and play in the mud."

Three more sections were added to the long tube that day. And Duke Corey and Terry Braid sent up such quantities of sand from the cylinder that even the men of the gang who had known them for years wondered how they could endure the strain.

One bucket after another came twisting up from the hole, and still there was no signal from the two sand hogs that they wanted to quit work. The long summer day drew to a close, lights blinked from the windows of the surrounding skyscrapers, Wall Street finished its business day, and throngs of pedestrians hurried through the street to the subway.

MATT McCARTHY placed large reflectors close to the cylinder, and the excavation was flooded with light. Two miners in the second pit had struck water and had been forced to stop. Others in the three remaining pits along the side wall called for lights and kept on with their work. Big Swede and Scotty clambered about the cylinder head, setting and resetting the braces, loading pig iron onto the platform, when Duke and Terry crawled up to the surface and ordered the cylinder to be dropped still farther into the earth.

The moving figures of the men threw long, dancing shadows on the surrounding walls. Their voices echoed hollowly along the deserted streets, mingling with the roar of the compressor. The hiss of air surging through the hose lines and the sudden blast of escaping pressure when a valve was opened gave an eerie touch to the scene. It seemed that the men were Titans, laboring at some forge of the underworld.

It was nine o'clock when the cylinder was sunk for the last time. Despite additional quantities of pig iron loaded upon the platform, the tube refused to lower.

"I guess that does the trick," said Duke. "Let's go down, Terry, and see what it's sitting on."

"Feller—don't you ever get tired?" asked Terry.

"Not on this job. There's too much to do and not enough time to do it. Get those legs moving."

They climbed slowly down the rungs that led one hundred feet beneath the surface of the earth. At intervals a glowing electric light swung from an insulated cable that extended to the top of the lock. Beside it throbbed the pressure line, thumping rhythmically against the iron wall in answer to the beat of the compressor's pistons.

At the entrance to the lock both men stopped and instinctively looked up. The dimly lit tube seemed to extend upward to infinity. Shouts of the men working in the excavation were hushed to mere whispers. Despite the warmth of the night, there was a sharp chill at the base of the cylinder, and the walls were glistening with moisture. They stood in a circular world they had built with their hands, a ghostly world of subterranean quiet.

"Let's go," said Duke, and crawled down through the lock door.

He stepped aside, and when Terry

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had joined him he swung the door closed. He opened a valve leading to the chamber below, and a blast of scorching air swept in upon them. The air had been raised with each downward step and was now thrusting against the sand with a pressure of forty-five pounds to each square inch of surface.

It was a live thing, beating at the men with an intangible fierceness that seemed to consume them. Each movement was effort, each breath was drawn against a set of invisible bands that encircled their chests.

The heat of the highly compressed air wrapped them in sultry folds, a contrast to the chill of the tube above them that filled them with nausea. Sweat drenched their bodies, twisting in streams along their mud caked arms. They leaned against the wall of the lock, bracing themselves, forcing their bodies to accept this unnatural condition.

When the pressure was equalized and the lower door opened, they crawled into the bottom chamber with movements of men who were loaded with chains. Working silently, they scooped sand from beneath them and loaded it into the upper lock. Thin streams of water trickled into the shovel cuts.

"We'll have to lift the air a few pounds," said Duke. "It will take fifty to clear the bottom."

TERRY nodded and signalled to the men above by a series of short blasts from an exhaust valve. The roar of incoming pressure increased. The water melted away, and they returned to their work. At length Duke's shovel struck a solid substance. He dropped to his knees and brushed the sand aside with his hands.

"There it is, old-timer," he said. "Bed rock!"

The iron shell of the tube had been forced down to a sheet of primordial rock upon which rests the entire structure of lower Manhattan. It was gray stuff, porous and rotted at the surface and covered with a blue coating of clay that had once been organic ooze—minute animal forms and microscopic plants of an ancient ocean.

The rim of the cylinder rested upon rock. The porous section must be cleared away and the iron tube dropped a few feet farther, but that was work for another day. Duke and Terry climbed wearily into the upper lock, opened a valve slightly and crouched on the floor waiting for the pressure to escape.

"Good day's work," said Duke. "Better than I expected."

"Oh, I knew this old tin can would find its way down to bed rock," laughed Terry. "But a few hours ago I didn't think we would recognize it when we arrived."

"It was a close one," agreed Duke. "But we've seen closer. How about remembering a few of them over a bottle of rye tonight?"

"Great idea. Where are you living?"

"At a two-bit hotel off Broadway on Forty-fourth Street. Want to double up with me?"

"Why not?" said Terry. "Two can live as cheap as one. But can you cook and darn socks?"

"Listen, wise guy," grinned Duke. "Ask Fay that question when you're holding hands in the park tonight."

Terry frowned and said nothing.

Duke realized he had made a mistake in mentioning Fay's name.

Why was she continually cropping up to cause trouble?

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"Let's get out of here," he said, and opened the valve wide.

Pressure fell quickly and the door dropped open. They climbed the long ladder to the ground level and walked slowly to a water tap at the edge of the excavation. Men were gathered about the spout, scrubbing and splashing, washing away the dirt and sand before donning their street clothes.

"What — no showers?" laughed Terry.

"You're lucky to have a water tap and a towel," said Duke. "Hurry up, get the top layer off and let's go home."

"Mind you, Terry Braid," shouted Matt McCarthy, "no gettin' drunk and landin' in jail tonight. 'Tis a big job we have and no time fer such nonsense."

"Speak for yourself, sweetheart," said Terry. "The last time I saw you was in a cell in Rio. Drunk and disorderly was the charge, and it cost me ten bucks to get you out."

"Ah, think not at all of that," laughed Matt. "I've reformed intirely. 'Tis the straight and narrow for me till the job is done. Then ye can get me out of a dozen jails."

"Who's going to stay on the job tonight?" asked Duke.

"I've arranged all that, me son," said Matt. "Me and the Swede will stick around with a few of the boys. And may it be our luck to have Cotello pay us a call. Sure, he'll get a warm reception."

"Thanks, Matt," said Duke. "See you in the morning—sober."

HE and Terry walked to the subway with a group of the men. Matt turned off the flares with the exception of one light by the compressor and climbed slowly to the street level after warning the remaining sand hogs to keep their eyes open for trouble. He found Big Swede flat on his back beneath Fay's car, tinkering energetically with the gas tank.

"Glory be," said Matt. "I'd plumb forgot this. Now what are we goin' to do about it, Swede, me child?"

"I fix that hole purty good," said Swede. "I put wooden plug in him so he don't leak no more and I fill him with gas."

"'Tis the work of a genius. Swede, can ye drive?"

"I ain't sure 'bout that. Maybe we try, ya?"

McCarthy tilted his head owlishly and stared at Big Swede. His eyes lifted and held to the car for a moment and then swung slowly to a restaurant farther down the street that advertised drinks at reasonable prices. "I'm dry," he announced. "We'll have just one small snort and think about this matter. Get up out of there, ye heathen, and follow me."

"Ya, I snort, too," agreed Big Swede. He climbed from beneath the car, wiped his hands upon his trouser legs, and followed McCarthy into the restaurant.

A long bar ran back from the door and a scintillating array of glassware beckoned invitingly. Matt stared at the reflection of his dirt-smeared working clothes in the mirror, then turned to look at Big Swede in evident disapproval. He closed his eyes in thought and clapped one huge paw over his mouth as though to keep any thoughts from escaping as words until he had martialed them in proper array. At length he pounded his fist upon the bar and faced the Swede.

"We'll telephone the girl and tell her to come and fetch the car herself," he said with the air of having uttered

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an unalterable decision. "That's just what we'll do."

"Ya," said Swede. "But first we drink—no?"

"Yes, we drink—no. I mean, we no drink, yes—now, damn it all, ye've got me talkin' backwards like yerself."

He waggled a thumb at the bartender and ordered two ryes. "To the job," he said, and downed the drink.

"Ya, to the yob," answered the Swede, and ordered another.

"To the next job," said Matt, and again waggled a thumb at the bartender as he hoisted his glass.

"To all yobs," said Swede, and reached for the bottle.

In solemn agreement they finished it. Swede fumbled through his pockets and produced a soiled five-dollar bill. He unfolded it slowly and spread it upon the bar.

"Look what I find," he said, and stared at the bill in evident wonder. "That be good, ya?"

"Ya," said Matt, and again the thumb waggled. When a new bottle had been produced, he turned squarely to face Big Swede. "'Tis yer last chance," he said. "Can you—or can you not drive?"

"Ya," said Big Swede, and clasped loving fingers about the bottle.

"That settles everything. 'Twould be a disgraceful thing to leave that poor little girl alone in New York with no aut'mobile.

"Swede, me son—she gets the car, and you drive."

"To the yob," said Swede, and drank accordingly.

"No, ye ignorant Swede—to her house."

"To her house," agreed Swede, and again tilted the bottle.

"And now, me son, there's work to be done. Not another drink this night."

"Tha's right, Matty. 'Nother drink this night," said Big Swede, and emptied the bottle.

THEY walked happily across the street to the door of the parked coupé and Big Swede grunted and squeezed until his legs were jammed into place and his arms wrapped tightly about the wheel. Matt tumbled in beside him and produced the card bearing Fay's address.

"'Tis on Park Avenue," he said triumphantly when the card had at length been brought into focus. "And would ye be knowin' how to get there?"

"I like parks, ya," grunted the Swede and jabbed at the starter.

The car left the curb and wavered slowly along the deserted street to Broadway. With a little assistance from Matt, Big Swede swung the wheel and they headed north. Blithely ignoring the traffic lights, they reached the intersection of Fifth Avenue and Broadway and paused for a discussion as to the desirability of each street. Matt held out for Broadway, but Big Swede settled into a stubborn silence and swung up Fifth Avenue.

At Fifty-ninth Street he sent the car flying into the entrance to Central Park and triumphantly jammed on the brakes.

"I find him," he grinned and pointed to the trees.

"Sure now, do ye think she's a squirrel?" asked Matt. "What would she be doin' here?"

"You say, park—here be a good park, ya?"

"I should have known better than to trust you," said Matt sadly and climbed from the car.

He questioned a pedestrian as to the

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whereabouts of the address on Fay's card and returned to the car like a conqueror.

"Ahead and to the right," he ordered and Big Swede obeyed implicitly.

The car left the driveway, swung majestically over the sidewalk and started across the lawn.

"Stop!" cried Matt. "Don't you know you can't take short cuts through the scenery?"

"You say ahead and to right," argued Big Swede. "I do both."

"Get back on the roadway this instant or I murder you," roared Matt. "'Tis the likes of you would get us stuck in jail with a great job to be done. Think of the widows and orphans!"

"Why?" asked the Swede and backed onto the drive.

"Blessed if I know," answered Matt. "Here—out this road to the right—look out, now, mind that car."

"I be swell driver, ya?"

"We'll find out when you turn into Park Avenue. There it is—now around to the right—whoa!"

"Good?"

"Practically perfect," said Matt and stepped from the car. "But I'm blessed if I can remember what happened to that rear left fender. I'm sure we had all of them when we started but we're shy one now."

"We go back and look?" suggested Big Swede.

"We do not. Follow, me son—and say nothing."

A TALL doorman, resplendent in gold braid against a white linen uniform, eyed them with disapproval and stood squarely before the entrance to a large apartment house.

"The delivery entrance is to the rear," he said doubtfully.

"So what?" asked Matt.

"Come, now—get on with you, my men. Get on."

"Ain't he pretty?" asked Matt.

"Maybe he owns a ship—a captain, ya?" suggested Big Swede.

"Do you own a ship?" asked Matt innocently.

"Get the hell out of here," said the august personage, suddenly deciding to put aside the formalities of Park Avenue and descend for a moment to the level of his annoyers. "Scram, or I'll toss you in the gutter."

"Ahaa!" said Matt. "He's no gentleman."

"He could be sailor," persisted Big Swede, and smiled at the doorman. "You own ship, ya?"

The doorman grasped Big Swede firmly by the front of his khaki shirt and pushed. Nothing happened. He pushed again with the same result as though his hands had been against a stone wall.

"Ho!" laughed Big Swede. "You want to play, ya?"

His wide paws came down with a resounding thump upon the shoulders of the white linen uniform, one arm hooked around the doorman's neck and the other reached up to join it. The doorman felt his feet leave the ground and swing through the air.

"Catch, Matty," said Big Swede and opened his hands.

"'Tis no time for nonsense," said Matt and side stepped. The doorman's head brought up against the sidewalk and he slipped quietly into slumber.

"Ah, now look what you do," said Big Swede sorrowfully regarding his fallen playmate. "He don't want to play no more."

There was a slight discussion with the hall man when they wandered across the wide foyer, but having seen

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the result of the doorman's argument, he agreed to call Miss Morley on the house phone.

"A—a Mr. McCarthy to see you, Miss Morley," he said. "And another person—they—er—"

"Send them up immediately," came the surprising answer and the hall man escorted them to the elevator. He resented the familiarity with which the Irishman thumbed his nose at him and he was even more annoyed by Big Swede's friendly cuff on the ear. But the Morleys were *the Morleys,* old man Morley owned this magnificent apartment and quite a few in addition. Their guests and their guests' actions were therefore above reproach. He decided not to call the police but to lend what assistance he could to the fallen dignitary on the sidewalk.

"Hello, Matt darling," said Fay when she opened the door to admit the sand hogs. "I had given you up for lost. What detained you, who's your friend and where did you get the beautiful brannigan?"

"Bless the child," said Matt. "She thinks we're drunk. I've never been so insulted in me life. Of course, me friend here—Big Swede—well, I don't answer for him. Now he *may* have had one drop too many. And that was what delayed us. He likes parks."

"So do I," said Fay and her slim hand disappeared within the cavern of Big Swede's right paw.

She led them into the library and seated them comfortably. A sudden self-consciousness had come over both men at the evidences of grandeur about them and she wisely excused herself and left them alone for a few moments.

"The servants are away," she explained. "There's only Helen, my maid, here in New York with me and she's gone for the evening. Make yourselves at home—I'll find the cold beer I promised you, Matt."

ALONE in the large room with its row of bookcases, the two sand hogs drew deep breaths and tried to "steady down a bit," as Matt put it. His eyes wandered about to the portraits of dignified gentlemen staring down at him from the walls and he fixed each in turn with an answering solemn stare. He examined the dull finished table and comfortable furnishings, nodded in approval and looked in dismay at the tracks left by his muddy boots in the long knap of the rug. His fingers explored his pockets for his pipe. He looked at it with longing, decided against the temptation and frowned at Big Swede who was helping himself from a box of cigarettes on the table.

"She say to be at home," argued Big Swede. "Home, I smoke." He lit the cigarette and grinned happily.

"If ye take off yer boots, I'll murder you," warned Matt. "Remember, we're in society."

"You're at the home of someone who thinks you're a pair of darlings," said Fay as she set a tray filled with cool bottles and tall glasses on the table. "Take off your boots, Swede—be comfortable."

Big Swede's face curved in a huge smile. He wagged his head from side to side and scuffed awkwardly at the rug.

"That don't be polite," he said. "Only Irishman does that."

"Will you hark to the barbarian?" said Matt. "And me with the blood of Irish kings in me veins. We'll talk of that later, me son."

Fay laughed and poured the beer. She did it naturally and without the

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slightest suggestion that she was unused to performing this duty. There was a bowl of pretzels and she sipped and nibbled quite contentedly and roared with laughter at Matt's description of the trip up Fifth Avenue. Big Swede thawed visibly under the mellowing influence of the beer and he contributed an occasional correction to Matt's story. He was stretched out in an easy chair, one hand clamped firmly about a cool glass, the other tossing innumerable pretzels into his mouth. The cigarette smouldered in an ash tray nearby and sent a thin line of smoke up toward the oak paneled ceiling.

WITH the rugged honesty of laborers who are proud of their place in the scheme of things, the two sand hogs completely dismissed the incongruity of the scene and settled down to enjoy a pleasant evening. They liked Fay.

She was real—honest. And they reached back into their memories for stories of adventures in far off lands that would amuse her. Matt noticed her eyes light up at the mention of Duke's name and he wove wonderful tales with this man as the hero. Big Swede grunted enthusiastic affirmations to each of these yarns and matched them with others that wandered off into the impossible.

"I was frightened today," Fay said at length, bringing them slowly to the thought that was uppermost in her mind. "I was afraid he would not come out alive."

"Today?" scoffed Matt. "Sure, that was nothing. If that compressor—"

He stopped in confusion.

"What is the matter?" she asked.

"May the divil fly away with us," he growled. "Here I sit, gabbin' like an old woman when Swede and myself should be watchin' the compressor. If Cotello and his boys should put that bit of machinery out of commission, we'd be sunk for fair."

"I don't understand," said Fay.

She leaned forward eagerly. She had been wise enough not to ask questions before the men were comfortable. They would have answered by evasions, muttered some half-hearted excuses and left. But now she knew they considered her one of them. Whatever they said would be truth, and never before had Fay wanted the truth so much as at this moment.

"Cotello and the other contractors don't want us to get started," explained Matt. "Most of them are content to wish us hard luck and sit back to watch us go broke. But Cotello is a bad one. He'll try anything to break us—took a whack at it today and nearly put it across. Sure, 'twould never do fer him if the boys got started on their own. He could never compete with us."

"But what more can he do?" asked Fay.

"Lord knows. But the compressor is his best bet—we've only the one, you know."

"Could you get another?"

"Not without money, and we have little of that."

"Suppose I lend you some—enough to buy a compressor?"

"Now, bless you, me child," said Matt. "You don't buy them things—you rent them."

"Fine," said Fay. "We'll rent one tonight."

"That's good idea, ya," said Big Swede suddenly, setting down his glass so forcefully as to set the bottles jingling. "Tonight we rent one—good!"

"Now, stop this talk, both of ye,"

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roared Matt. "Where on earth could we rent a machine at this hour of the night?"

"Same place you rent him in the daytime," said Big Swede triumphantly, and hooked a pretzel with his thumb.

"And where might that be?" asked Matt.

"Me—I dunno. I think maybe you know."

"Duke takes care of all that sort of thing," said Matt. "'Tis not part of my job at all."

"Very well," said Fay. "I'll find out from Duke. But he must not know what we're doing, or that would spoil everything. This is just amongst the three of us—sort of a surprise for the rest of the gang. Are you with me?"

"I like sooprises," said Big Swede.

"Ye'll get a terrific one in a minute," promised Matt, "if you don't heave yer big bones out of that chair and get back to the job. Come along, ye heathen."

"Then it is all agreed upon," said Fay as she walked to the door with the two sand hogs. "I'll take care of all the details and let you know tomorrow, Matt. Then you two will have to get the machine working without Duke knowing where it came from. Is that right?"

"'Tis absolutely perfect," said Matt, and solemnly shook hands.

Big Swede bowed from the waist, swung to an upright position with difficulty, and stepped into the elevator. A mouthful of pretzels stopped his good-by.

"Oh, Matt," said Fay as though in afterthought. "Where does Duke live?"

"The Hotel Charlton, ye little divil," laughed Matt. "I've been waitin' fer that question fer an hour."

Fay wrinkled the tip of her nose at him and instructed the elevator boy to secure a taxi for her guests and pay the driver in advance.

Matt winked knowingly as the door closed and Fay winked in return.

CHAPTER VI.

UNFINISHED FIGHT.

DUKE COREY was under the shower, enjoying the tingle of icy water, when the telephone rang. Terry had finished his ablutions and was clearing Duke's clothes from some of the bureau drawers to make room for his own. He reached for the receiver, and his eyes narrowed slightly when Fay's voice asked for Duke.

"Just a moment, I'll get him," he said, and turned toward the bathroom door. "Hey, Duke—there's a girl friend of yours on the phone."

"Tell her I'm all wet," laughed Duke. "And then make a date for yourself."

"Sorry—this one's important. It's Fay."

"Fay?" shouted Duke. "You're crazy."

He stepped into the room, struggling into a bathrobe and leaving a trail of water on the floor as he walked. Terry was smiling enigmatically and had resumed his work at the bureau. There was a puzzled frown on Duke's face as though he half-suspected that Terry had played a joke upon him.

"Yeah—this is Duke," he said. "Who are you?"

Fay had recognized Terry's voice, and it was something she had not bargained for. Matt had said nothing about Terry and Duke living at the same hotel, and she had not given Terry a thought when she called. But

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Fay was a woman. Already she regretted the mistake she had made at the job earlier in the day. It would require skillful diplomacy to handle this situation, and Fay was a master of that art.

"This is Fay," she said. "Can you tell me where I can get in touch with Terry?"

"You've just been talking to him," said Duke, and grinned with both relief and amusement. "Hold on a second."

He put down the receiver and poked Terry in the ribs.

"The lady is looking for you, handsome," he said, and started for the bathroom.

Terry stared at Duke's back and then at the telephone as though in indecision. Maybe he had been too hasty.

"Hello, Fay — what's bothering you?" he said.

"You are, funny face," she laughed. "I didn't come all the way from Caliente to be dismissed with a shrug in New York. I've been waiting two hours for a call from you, and finally I have to chase you all over town. What's the idea?"

"How did you know Duke's number?" asked Terry.

"Found it in the book."

"Yes—but—"

"But, nothing," said Fay quickly. "Do we go places tonight or do I fly south?"

"Well, Duke and I were just going out for a late supper. You can join us and we'll argue about it then."

"Fine," said Fay. "You can buy me a drink—but no arguments. Where do I find you?"

"At the Astor Grill, in an hour."

"I'll be there," said Fay, and she hung up the receiver.

Terry would have liked to ask innumerable questions, but there was no use talking to a dead wire. He dropped the receiver on the hook and strolled toward the bathroom door.

"Hurry up, Duke," he said. "We've got a dinner date with Fay."

"You mean, *you* have," said Duke. "Count me out. I need sleep, feller. Besides, I've heard enough arguments for one day. Give her my regards and tell her I'll see her at your wedding."

"Forget it, will you? I know I've been acting a little screwy, but I'm sunk this time. Fay's different—she's—"

"She's great," agreed Duke, as he struggled with a pair of socks that needed mending. "And she's going to make a fine little wife—and you love her—and you're going to marry her—and now shut up and get out of here."

But Terry was adamantine, and at length Duke gave up the battle. They crossed the brightly lighted section of Broadway that is Times Square and found a table in a corner of the Astor Grill.

The hum of conversation was hushed for an instant as they seated themselves. Broadway is used to a great many things, but *men* are scarce in the Bright Light sector—at least, such men as were these two. The width of their shoulders threatened the seams of their coats. They were tall and straight and moved with a certain sureness that set them apart. Terry's manner was harsh, uncompromising, and somewhat aggressive. He dismissed the suggestion of the head waiter in the selection of a table and chose the one he liked.

DUKE, while less aggressive than Terry, was a decided character in this gathering place of Broadway. There was a slowness and rhythm

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in his walk that gave him the appearance of moving to unheard music. Women instinctively smiled and approved. Two girls from the chorus of a musical comedy that had recently closed sipped thoughtfully of their cocktails and tried to look interesting. A night club singer nudged a sudden elbow against the ribs of her columnist companion and said, "Who are they, and why don't I know them?" A gambler who owned a stable of fighters studied them closely, wondering if it might not be well to meet them and add them to his list.

Duke and Terry were busy with the menu. They decided correctly that Fay must have finished dinner hours ago and would join them later. Duke was uneasy. He ordered quickly and hurried through his meal. He was polishing off a wide slab of apple pie when he caught sight of her coming toward them. Fay's eyes were holding steadily to him and he noticed an expression in them that worried him.

"Greetings, adorable," said Terry, who had turned to follow Duke's gaze. He arose and held a chair. "You're just in time for dessert."

Duke was on his feet, forcing a smile and blandly ignoring the intimate pressure of Fay's fingers when her hand met his.

"It's after working hours," she said. "You're not angry with me now, are you?"

"I'm afraid it would be difficult to stay angry with you even during working hours," he said. "And tonight you are charming."

He said it simply and sincerely, and indeed Fay deserved the compliment. She had dressed carefully for this occasion—a cocktail dress of black mousseline, a three-quarter length black velvet coat and black lace turban, small and tilted jauntily amidst a mass of swirling blond curls—and she was pleased that Duke had noticed. She flirted outrageously with both men, and at length led the conversation skillfully away from generalities and brought it to the subject uppermost in their minds—the job.

"I once knew another chap in the construction business," she lied gracefully. "He was connected with a supply company—sold or rented things to dig excavations—or something like that. Now, let me see—what *was* the name of his firm?"

"Contractors Trading Company?" suggested Duke. "They're a big outfit and do a lot of business in the East. We get our things from them."

"No-o-o," said Fay, and smiled at the facility with which her quest was accomplished. "Not them. But it does not make any difference. Let's talk about our job."

"*Our* job?" said Terry. "Have you been voted a member of this outfit?"

"Definitely," she smiled. "Two handsome and charming gentlemen have taken care of that."

AND Duke and Terry immediately gave themselves full credit that neither deserved. Terry grinned and patted Fay's hand in approval, and Duke pushed back his chair, thinking this would be a good time to bow out gracefully and leave them alone. But as he was about to make his excuses a hand dropped upon his shoulder, and he turned to find a thin, dark featured man standing beside his chair.

"Hello, Cotello," said Duke in evident displeasure.

"Glad I found you, Duke," said Cotello. "And you, too, Terry. Didn't know you two had hooked up—thought Terry was in Mexico."

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"I am," said Terry, "as far as you are concerned. Good-by, Cotello."

"Friendly little chap, isn't he?" said Cotello to Duke.

"I said *good-by,* Cotello," snapped Terry. "I don't like you—never did like you, and don't want to look at you."

"Fair enough," said the contractor. "But Duke and I have a little business deal to talk over. I stopped in at the hotel, and the clerk said I would find you here. It's important, or I wouldn't intrude."

"Is that right, Duke?" asked Terry.

"Part of it. I told the clerk we would be here in case Matt or one of the boys called. I figured they might have a little trouble tonight. But Cotello and I have no deal on."

"Yes, we have," said Cotello. "I'm willing to meet any fair figure you name to take over the work. Now—may I sit down for a moment?"

"Please do," said Fay quickly; and when Terry and Duke looked at her in surprise she continued, "It's so much nicer to talk quietly than it is to shout."

"Er—this is Mr. Cotello, the contractor," said Terry by way of introduction. "And I am not at all pleased to present him, Miss Morley."

"Miss Morley!" said Cotello. "Rupert Morley's daughter?"

"Yes," smiled Fay.

"Whew! That makes a difference. Now I know where you fellows are getting your backing. And it doubles my offer, too. I didn't realize *the* Rupert Morley had gone into the contracting business, and I'm honest enough to hope he doesn't stay in it long."

"You're wrong on all three counts," said Terry. "We aren't getting any backing from Mr. Morley—we don't want an offer—and you were never honest. Right, Duke?"

Duke smiled and caught a twinkle in Fay's eyes. Cotello flushed slightly and swung to face Terry.

"You talk a tough game, Braid," he said. "But a few more headaches like you had today may cool you off."

A glass crumbled in Duke's hand.

"*What do you mean?*" he said, and the words carried the crack of a lash. He was leaning across the table, staring at the contractor.

Cotello realized too late he had spoken unwisely. He smiled thinly and beckoned the waiter with the evident intention of placing an order.

"I said—what do you mean?" repeated Duke.

"I'm waiting, too," added Terry.

"Why, I heard you had some trouble today," said Cotello smoothly. "Some sort of excitement at the job."

"Who told you?" asked Terry.

"I don't remember just at the moment. But does it really make any difference?"

"Plenty!" said Terry. "Because we haven't told anyone. And if you know—you ordered it. You—"

HE spun back his chair, gripped Cotello by the collar, and started a smashing drive at the contractor's jaw. Duke was around the table and had stepped in front of Terry's punch before the blow had traveled a foot.

He caught Terry by the arms and forced him back into his chair. "Quit it, you fool!" he cried. "That's just what he's looking for. Do you want to land both of us in jail?"

"So what!" roared Terry. "We've been in jail before—plenty. Look out—let me get one crack at that mug!'

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"The job, Terry! Think of the job!" shouted Duke. "We can't afford to lose any time. How about the others? They can't make a go of it alone."

"Never mind the others!" barked Terry. "Don't forget I was in that cylinder when it was sinking—you may not think much about your life, but this is the only one I've got. And if you think I'm going to let Cotello pull a gag like that and get away with it, you're crazy as hell. Let go of me!"

Duke's fingers were bent in an unbreakable grip on the sleeves of Terry's coat. He was forcing the raging sand hog down against the chair with every ounce of strength in his shoulders.

"You brainless idiot!" he snapped. "Shut up!"

"Don't give me any orders," stormed Terry. "And quit pullin' this hero stuff—it may look big to Fay, but it's sour to me. I'm 'way ahead of you, Duke."

Cotello was smiling now. He leaned against the edge of the table and watched the struggle in amusement. Every eye in the room was upon the two men. Waiters were hurrying toward them, but none came too close. Women were standing on chairs, leaning upon the shoulders of their escorts, too interested to be frightened. The gambler who managed fighters was smiling grimly—he would know in a moment if these two could handle themselves. No one spoke. No one moved.

And suddenly Fay got up from her chair. Her head was high and she turned deliberately from the two men and faced Cotello.

"Would you be good enough to take me home, Mr. Cotello?" she said quietly.

The contractor sprang to his feet. Surprise was in his face mingling with pronounced pleasure. He offered his arm, smiled insolently at Duke and Terry, and walked with Fay past the crowd of staring Broadwayites. Duke heard him laugh as they reached the street, and it was with visible effort that he restrained from sending a fist against Terry's jaw.

"Well, chump—how do you like *those* apples?" he said. He released his grip upon Terry and reached for the check that a flustered waiter was waving toward him. He tossed a bill upon the table and straightened his coat collar. "Let's get out of here."

"Still playing the hero, eh?" said Terry. "Listen, feller—why don't you get wise to yourself? I've been watching you make a play for Fay from the minute you met her. All this hokum about 'She's your girl—I don't want her,' and the strong, silent man bunk is swell in the movies. But Terry Braid doesn't go for that at all. I think you are a louse, and I'd like just one clear smack at your jaw—see?"

Duke's knuckles were white as he leaned upon the table and stared at Terry. He knew that jealousy was tearing things from Terry's throat that ordinarily would have remained unsaid. It was a different Terry who faced him—not the same happy-go-lucky friend who had knocked around the world with him in the past. This man was bitter, cynical, and deliberately looking for fight.

AND a subtle difference had invaded Duke's mind. At any time in the past he would have laughed at Terry, called him an old barrel-head and walked off. The next morning everything would have been forgotten and Terry would have apologized.

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But now the words carried a sting that made him forget their long friendship. He found himself staring at Terry's jaw, measuring it for a blow—and he felt the muscle of his shoulders tighten in anticipation.

"You're not in Mexico, Braid," he snapped. "And you're not barking at some half-pint that's afraid of your shadow. Come on—let's find an alley."

There was an instant hum of voices in the grill. A half-dozen men signalled quickly for their checks with the evident intention of following to see the fun. Women whispered to their escorts, and the columnist smiled in anticipation of an interesting paragraph. One man moved forward with definite purpose and stood beside Duke Corey.

"Just a minute, fellers," he said quietly. "I'm Curly Brandfort, and I run a string of fighters. You may have heard of me?"

"Aw, go lay an egg," growled Terry and started for the door.

"Wait a minute!" said Brandfort. "You guys are going to get locked up if you go into a waltz in this neighborhood. Why not come up to my gym and play smart? There's a ring there—gloves—"

"What makes you so interested?" asked Duke.

"Don't be foolish," laughed Brandfort. "This is going to be worth watching. And I like fights."

"You'll see one," promised Terry. "Where's your joint?"

"About two minutes from here in a taxi."

"How about you, Mr. Hero?" said Terry to Duke.

"You're asking for it, Braid. Let's go."

Brandfort winked knowingly to the columnist and walked to the door, placing himself carefully between the two sand hogs. They stepped into a taxi and nothing was said until they reached the entrance to a private gymnasium on West Fifty-fourth Street.

Brandfort paid the driver and ushered them up two flights of stairs and into a large room. He snapped on the lights, closed the door, and waved a hand toward a raised boxing ring in the center of the floor.

"Fair enough?" he asked.

"Perfect," said Terry, and proceeded to strip to the waist.

DUKE was silent. Reason told him they were acting like children, but some stronger instinct forced him to keep on. He had never, he thought, been so anxious to fight as at this moment.

He tried to analyze his reactions to Terry's outbursts, wondering if he had actually given Braid any reason for jealousy. His thoughts refused to answer. There came a picture of Fay smiling, the remembrance of that additional pressure she had put into their handclasp, fragmentary images of Terry and he trapped in a sinking cylinder—and then he heard Terry laugh and call to him.

He looked up. Braid was standing in the ring, his lips parted in a mocking smile and in each hand he held a pair of boxing gloves, extending them toward Duke.

"Brandfort thought you might want these," he said.

"Tell him to stuff a mattress with them," said Duke, and crawled between the ropes.

"Nix, fellers," protested Brandfort. "I'm not looking for a slaughter—just a friendly little scrap. Put on the gloves."

Duke ignored him. His fists closed,

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his shoulders hunched, he moved forward slowly.

"Come and get it, Braid," he said.

"Anything to oblige, punk," said Terry, and stepped in.

His head was low between his shoulders, and his arms flexed at the elbows. He dropped into a low crouch. His shoulders weaved slightly and suddenly he sprang, sending a shower of inside hooks at Duke's jaw. A heavy fist caught him full in the mouth, ground the lips between his teeth and filled his mouth with blood. But it was as though the blow had never been struck. Right and left, he hammered home a bruising set of hooks that thudded against Duke's jaw. With each swing he stepped forward, crowding, crouching, boring in with head down and chin against his chest.

Duke stood erect, his arms crooked at the elbows and held at his waist. He took the full fury of Terry's charge without lifting his hands, save for one smashing blow to the mouth. It was as though he were weighing the strength of Braid's punches, watching the swing of those arms and measuring. Then he stepped back.

His feet moved without visual effort and his body drifted out from under Terry's attack. Up came his arms, two long rapiers of bone and muscle. The left flowed smoothly forward and smashed against Braid's chin. The right followed in a streaking arc and found the same spot.

Terry grunted and dropped back upon his heels. His rush was stopped, and he set himself for another. He plunged forward, hooking, chopping, widening the swing of his blows. But they whistled harmlessly through empty air. And then, as though out of nowhere, came a jarring crash against his jaw.

Brandfort had seated himself near the ringside, but Terry's first attack drew him to his feet. He was leaning on the edge of the ring, a smoldering cigar clenched tightly between his teeth, his hands flat on the canvas, eyes wide in surprise.

He had expected to see a pair of bruising palookas mauling and pawing at each other and to enjoy a good laugh. Instead, he was watching two fighting machines methodically trying to destroy each other. He had seen fights—many fights. But never had he seen such cold fury as was concentrated in the ring before him.

Terry had changed his attack. He was no longer driving for Duke's jaw, but was intent upon crowding him into a corner to hammer at his stomach and heart. His blows were short, vicious jabs that cut through Duke's guard and landed solidly against flesh. At times he lifted one, sliding it upward along the chest, trying for a knockout.

Duke felt the ropes burn into his back. He moved quickly aside and drifted to the center of the ring.

"Bashful?" growled Terry. "Or don't you like to play rough?"

BRANDFORT said later that Duke's feet did not move, nor for that matter could he remember how or where the punches came from. But one moment Duke was in the center of the ring, his arms down and head forward. The next, he was sliding toward Terry, and Brandfort heard the smash of fists against bone.

Terry's arm went limp. He lurched forward to his knees and two blue puffs swelled beneath his eyes. He staggered erect, pawing blindly, shaking his head and vainly trying to find Duke.

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"Move in, Corey," he said. "And let's play marbles for keeps."

Duke laughed and drove forward. His hands beat a rapid tattoo against Braid's ribs.

Terry locked his arms about Duke's waist, lifted him from the floor and plunged in a headlong dive at the canvas. They landed with a dull crash that shook the ring and Braid's head ground against Duke's chin.

"Quit it, you wild men!" shouted Brandfort. "I'll have a murder on my hands."

There was no answer from the rolling, threshing pair upon the floor. This was sand hog style—anything went—there was no such thing as a foul.

Fists and elbows, heads and knees—every part of the body that could be brought into play—was used to hammer and smash.

Duke's left arm was wrapped tightly about Braid's neck. His right fist smashed against a jaw that was held in position by his clenched hand. Up came Terry's knee and drove against Duke's stomach. He gasped, sinking his head against Braid's chest, and strove desperately to draw air into his lungs. Lights flared in dancing circles as a fist landed squarely upon the nape of his neck. He jerked forward and felt his head crash against Terry's chin. He lurched to his knees.

Again Braid's arms were about him, and the two men locked wrists behind each other's back, squeezing, straining with every ounce of strength in their bodies to hold and crush. Their breath was hot, and blood-flecked froth blew from their lips as their lungs labored and swelled. They were drenched and slippery with sweat. It dashed in great drops from their heaving backs, red and heavy with blood from newly opened cuts on their shoulders.

Duke gathered his feet beneath him. He lunged backward, thrusting at the canvas-covered floor, dragging Terry upward. He dropped his arms, forced them up between their tightly locked chests, and drove the heels of his hands against Terry's chin.

Terry lashed out blindly with both fists and connected. Duke swayed, spit red froth from his mouth, and leaned forward. He blinked and measured his distance.

A thundering right hook caught Braid just below the ear and sprawled him across the lower rope. His hands went up, clutching, grabbing at anything within reach to help him erect. He caught the upper rope, clung for an instant and then sank to the canvas. Both legs twitched and stiffened.

"Stop!" cried Brandfort. "That man's dead!"

"Like hell, he is," growled Duke. "He'll be up—looking for more in a minute."

"Not in here, he won't. This is no slaughter house."

"Aw, shut up!" said Duke, and stumbled against the ropes. "You were anxious to see a fight—well, you are getting one."

TERRY was on his knees now, crawling toward the sound of Duke's voice. He was cursing, slowly but steadily coming forward an inch at a time—always forward. Duke was leaning limply against the ropes, resting the weight of his body upon the top strand. His legs were wide spread and wavering. He turned to face Terry, lifted his arms from the ropes and stepped away.

His knees buckled and he lurched forward, landing on his chest beside Terry.

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"They're maniacs!" cried Brandfort. "Both of them out cold and still fighting."

Braid's left hand was clenched in Duke's hair. His right was rising and falling with fingers half clenched—up and down, steadily upon Duke's face. Corey lifted his chest from the floor and inched closer. His hands rolled into fists, and his face twisted into a grin.

"You're going by-bye, Braid," he said, and hit.

Brandfort was through the ropes, tearing them apart, muttering, cursing, staring at them with eyes that were wide with horror. He rolled Duke over onto his back and held him there with one knee against his chest. He brushed Terry's groping arms away and cursed again.

"Some fun, eh, kid?" said a voice from the ringside.

It was Fred Noble, the newspaper writer who had followed from the Astor Grill in search of a paragraph. He had witnessed the fight from the rear of the gymnasium and had now got into the ring.

"Give me a lift," said Brandfort. "Or else go out and call a dozen cops. These guys will be tearing into each other again in a minute."

Noble grinned and hoisted Terry to his feet. He steered him to the ropes and helped him down the steps that led to the floor of the gymnasium.

Terry was pawing blindly at his eyes and shaking his head. "Where is he?" he mumbled. "I can't see—push me toward him—and get out of the way."

"Sure, feller," said Noble. "We're heading right for him now; only, he's out cold."

"He'll be up," said Terry.

"Of course—but not tonight. Here—sit here and let me clean you up a little. You look like something the cat dragged in."

In the ring, Brandfort was keeping a firm hand upon Duke's mouth to prevent him from answering Terry. The sand hog's veins were blue and rigid with his efforts to struggle erect. His eyes were staring and Brandfort waved an imploring arm to the columnist.

"Take that guy away, Noble—quick!" he shouted.

"Where?" grinned Noble.

"China — Africa — anywhere, only far, far away."

"Come on, pal," said Noble to Terry. "I'll buy a drink—and that's *something*. Slip into your coat—that's the stuff."

He helped Terry through the door, and Brandfort arose from his position on Duke's chest. He stepped warily backward and lifted his hands as though expecting Duke to leap at him. Instead, Corey climbed weakly to his feet and crawled through the ropes. He started toward the door, lips tight, lurching at every step, his fists opening and closing.

"He's gone, feller—he's gone!" cried Brandfort. "You can't catch up with him tonight. Be human, will you? Call it a day."

Duke stopped. He accepted the towel that Brandfort extended and tried to bring himself to some semblance of order. His trousers were ripped at both knees and covered with dark stains, his face was cut and bruised, and a trickle of blood came from his mouth.

"You shouldn't have stopped it," he said.

"That's only *your* guess," said Brandfort. "In about two minutes I would have been an accessory to a murder. Feller—I don't know where you two come from, but it must be a tough section of the country. Wow!"

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"Nuts!" said Duke. "If we had finished that argument we could have shaken hands and called it quits. All sand hogs do that. But now—"

"But now you'll try it again, eh? Well, not with me around. Once is enough. I'm cured."

They left the gymnasium, and Brandfort bundled Duke into a taxi.

CHAPTER VII.

TWO FACTIONS.

MATT McCARTHY and Big Swede were sleeping peacefully on a pile of coats near the compressor, when Duke arrived at the job in the morning. Two other sand hogs, Hopper and Clemens, were seated upon a pile of timber, reading the morning papers. Others of the night shift who had been left to watch the job were eating breakfast in a near-by restaurant.

Duke stood for a moment, breathing in the clear, crisp air of the morning. His coat was folded and slung across one shoulder. One eye was puffed and his lower lip was thick. He climbed slowly down the ladder to the excavation and crossed to the compressor. He smiled at the unmusical blending of snores that lifted above McCarthy and Big Swede and hooked his fingers in the Irishman's hair.

"It's tomorrow, Matt," he said, and shook the heavy thatch.

"Eh?" snorted Matt, lifting on one elbow to stare at Duke. He squinted, closed his eyes and opened them again. He lifted a huge paw and rubbed them. Then he looked again. "Saints presarve us—what a be-oo-ti-ful face! Have ye the mumps?"

"No," laughed Duke. "I spent some time at a gymnasium last night."

"Aha! So you will fool around with them Japanesers, eh? Duke, me son—I've told you to beware of foreigners. Where is the joint? We'll take it apart."

"What joint?"

"This here chop suey place where they ganged you."

"A gymnasium is a place where you exercise," laughed Duke. "What did you think it was?"

"Exercise!" cried Matt. "Glory be! The man's gone daft completely." He pounded upon Big Swede's chest and stirred the sleeping giant. "Look ye—Duke Corey has been exercisin'!"

Big Swede stared and squinted, yawned and spread his arms in a prodigious stretch.

"I like exercise, ya," he said sleepily. "Who we fight now?"

Matt cuffed his ear and turned to stare about the excavation. His eyes widened as he saw Terry Braid climb slowly down the ladder and limp toward them.

"Another exerciser," he said. "And now I'm beginnin' to see the light. Ye've been mixin' it—the two of ye. And just my luck to miss the party!"

TERRY and Duke eyed each other steadily for a moment and neither spoke. Terry had not shown up at their hotel room, and his clothes gave mute evidence of the battle of the previous night.

So did his face. His eyes were slits that glared from above two blue lumps. His lips also were swollen and there was a long cut on his jaw. But this jaw was thrust forward aggressively and he swayed lightly on his feet as though expecting a sudden swing from one of Duke's fists.

"Well," he said at length, "how about it?"

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"How about *what?*" snapped Duke. "Work or fight?"

"Either suits me. And this is a good spot for both."

"None of that stuff, me buckos," roared Matt, and stepped between them. "Divil a bit do I care what yer quarrel is. But this is no time fer pleasure. And it's surprised I am at you, Duke, fer not realizin' it."

"Fair enough, Matt," said Duke, and extended his hand toward Terry. "Do we shake?"

"We do *not!*" said Terry. "I can get along swell without you, Duke. I'll finish the job because my money is in it and because I started it. As for that friendship stuff—that's out. Save it for someone who trusts you. And the only favor I want from you is that you gather my rags together at the hotel. I'll send for them."

"Have it your own way," said Duke. "If you want to be thick about it—that's O. K. with me. But remember, feller—I'm running this job and I'm giving the orders. You'll take them and like it or scram."

"And that seems to take care of everything," said Matt, who was anxious to prevent a further breech between the men. It was seldom that sand hogs refused to shake hands after a fight, and McCarthy realized the grievance must be deep. And he was sure that a little blond girl with a turned-up nose had more than her share to do with it. He shook his head wearily and pointed to the second pit where all was in readiness for the placement of a cylinder.

"When do we start?" he asked.

"Terry will take five men and swing the bottom section into place—if he wants to work today," said Duke.

"Suits me," snapped Terry, and walked toward a group of sand hogs who had just arrived and were changing to their working clothes.

"How about you and the men who were here last night?" asked Duke. "Get enough sleep?"

"A good bit more than you, me son," laughed Matt. "Every one of them is ready to work."

"Fine. Swede—put some of them to work mixing concrete. I want a quick-setting batch to seal off the bottom of Number One. Tell the miners to get going on Three and Four. Hop to it. And as for you, Irishman—how about some pressure on Number One?"

"Comin' at you, me son," said McCarthy, and climbed to his perch on the compressor. The engine sprang into life and the roar of the exhaust filled the excavation.

AS the Number One cylinder was resting on bed rock, it had been possible to shut down the compressor and take the pressure off the cylinder for the night. The lower chamber had filled with water that seeped up past the cutting edge, but little of it had leaked into the lock. Pressure pouring into the cylinder would drive the water down and clear the lower chamber, and any that had filtered past into the lock could be run off the same way.

When the cylinder was cleared, Duke climbed down the long ladder and let himself into the bottom. Closing the door behind him, he opened an air valve and flooded the lock with pressure. The hot blast of incoming air drove him to his knees. He was still weak as a result of the fight and lack of sleep, and when fifty pounds of pressure wrapped him in its enervating folds, he slipped to the floor. He stayed there for a time, struggling to clear his head and get on with

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the work. An air drill had been lowered and rested on the floor beside him. He hooked the hose connection on to a valve above, opened the lower door, and lowered the drill into the bottom.

The rock floor was porous and rotted to a depth of six inches. He jabbed at it with a drill steel, probing and testing, and then attacked it with the drill. The steady *rat-tat-tat* of the jerking machine hammered back at him from the circular wall. In the cramped confines of the cylinder bottom the noise of the pounding exhaust beat against his eardrums with cruel force. He kept on, ripping out sections of rock, clearing a smooth circular pit in which the cylinder would fit snugly.

When he had finished he shoveled the crumbled rock into the upper lock, drew himself up through the small opening, and, after closing the lower door, exhausted the pressure.

When the upper door swung open he climbed the hundred-foot ladder to the surface of the ground and leaned wearily over the edge of the cylinder. Big Swede and a half dozen men were mixing concrete on a wooden platform, working in a circle, turning it with their shovels.

"Ready with the concrete?" called Duke.

"You bet you," answered Big Swede, grinning. "This be vary good stuff, ya."

"It better be," said Duke. "Get down below and seal off that bottom. And be damn sure it's water-tight." He turned toward the compressor, searching for McCarthy, but could not locate him. "Where's Matt?" he shouted.

"Some place, I guess," said Big Swede vaguely but with a worried glance to the gate that led out to the street.

"After a bottle, I suppose," said Duke, and climbed from the cylinder and started for the ladder. "I'll rub his ears off."

"No—Matt don't drink today," howled the Swede in alarm. "Better you look at this cement, ya. Maybe it don't be good."

"Now I know you're lying, and I'll probably find that Mick is in a gin mill," growled Duke. "Get on with your work."

HE went up the ladder, promising sudden death and destruction to one McCarthy, and stormed through the gate. But suddenly he stopped and frowned. Perched on a pile of timber at the curb, Fay and Matt were seated shoulder to shoulder, holding an animated conversation. Their voices were low, but Duke saw Fay's small hands beating insistent emphasis against McCarthy's protesting hands. Her head was nodding vigorously, she was smiling, and at times the heel of her slipper tapped against the timber.

In the midst of a sentence, Fay caught sight of Duke and started nervously when she saw his cut and swollen jaw.

"Good heavens!" she gasped. "What stepped on your face?"

"My barber was careless this morning," he answered shortly and turned to face McCarthy. "Listen, you—"

"Who shaved you?" she persisted. "Jim Braddock?"

"Will you please go away?" he asked wearily.

"No! Matt and I were doing fine until you arrived. And we won't mind if *you* go away. Will we, Matt?"

"If it is all the same to the both of ye," said Matt quickly, "*I'll* be on me way!"

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He walked to the gate whistling cheerfully, and broke into a few jig steps as he crossed the sidewalk. With a wink to Fay and tilt of his hat to Duke, he slammed the gate, and they heard him laughing heartily.

"Now what?" said Duke.

"First, you may apologize," smiled Fay. "I feel very charitable this morning and I may accept it."

"Apologize for giving you the opportunity to spend a pleasant evening with Cotello?"

"That wasn't very nice of you, Duke. You know why I left with Cotello—at least you should."

"I can't blame you for not wanting to be mixed up in a mess," he admitted ruefully. "But there was no trouble, really."

"Your eyes tell a different story, darling," she said lightly. "At least the one that is closed."

"Oh, that," he said and thought that it was very nice to be called darling by Fay, even though she did not mean it. Then his thoughts swung to Terry, and he frowned. "Well—good-by—see you again some time."

"Don't run away from me, Duke," she said. And she was not smiling now. She was looking up at him earnestly, a determined tightness to her lips. One small hand rested upon his arm, drawing him to a place beside her on the timber. "We're going to have a talk," she announced.

"About what?" asked Duke.

"Us—just the two of us. You're going to get something straight from the shoulder, Duke. You may not like it, but here it is. I love you."

HE stared at her foolishly. For a moment he seemed at a loss for words. At any other time he might have passed it off with a laugh, dismissed it with a well turned compliment, and accepted it as a joke. But here—at the job—the words were confusing.

He was a construction man, a sand hog; and men who work at that trade are unused to seeing women about. Work and love—the job and women—these two seldom find room in a laborer's mind. They are separate entities, not to be in any way drawn together. Women—they were something to think about when the grime and sand had been washed away and a man stepped out in his street clothes with money in his pocket. They seemed incongruous at the job, and Duke was taken off his guard.

"But, Fay—"

"But, nothing," she continued. "I'm not a child, Duke. I probably have more knowledge of men than you have of women. I mean, that if all the proposals of marriage made to me were put on a phonograph record it would play for hours. There have been princes and polo players, gigolos and stock brokers, writers and counts—"

"Any dukes?" he asked.

"That comes later. But, seriously, I have listened to them all, looked them over, and decided, 'No!' None of them seemed to fill the bill, and I wouldn't give most of them house room. Then I met you, and you might as well realize, young man, that I intend to marry you. And just what are you going to do about it?"

"Well—I—" stammered Duke, then he grinned. "Terry might not agree with you on some points."

"I expected that," she said. "Terry is a fine chap and I like him, but that just about covers it. As a husband, Terry would be as valuable as a pair of rubbers in the desert. No one would ever know where to look for him—he

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would probably be in Patagonia—and when he was located he would be surrounded by brunettes. And I'm a blonde."

"I'd never have guessed," laughed Duke. "But what makes me so eligible?"

"None of your damn business," she said surprisingly; and Duke noticed there were tears in her eyes.

He lifted her chin, stared for a full minute into these eyes that were now brimming; and, as much to his own surprise as to hers, he kissed her.

"Now you've got mud on your nose," he smiled.

"Swell. Put some more on." She lifted her mouth.

"Get out of here," said Duke in pretended severity, and drew her to her feet. "Go on—run along, and I'll see you tonight."

"Oh, but I'm not *half* finished," she protested. "In fact, that's only the beginning."

"Young lady, we're drawing a crowd. Will you go, or must I spank you?"

"Again—no! I want to help out. You see, I've got money—oodles of it—gobs of it. And I could lend you some—"

"Forget it," said Duke. "We don't need any money.

"And if we did, we'd dig it up somewhere."

"But you're going to need it. You don't suppose I let Cotello make sheep's eyes at me for three hours last night without learning something, do you? After his third drink he told me quite confidentially he was going to fix this job for keeps in a day or two."

"*What?*"

"Ah, the man's interested," she nodded. "He's willing to admit that Fay might know something."

"Stop clowning and tell me what you know—this is serious."

"OF course it is. But when I get serious, you run away, or try to. If you will just stay put for a moment I'll tell you all about it. Now—he said you have only one compressor, and he was going to tie that up; and I think he said that would leave you up an alley. Something like that, at any rate, but I'm not sure. He decided to paw me then, and I left—but I kicked his shins first."

"I'll do better than that when I see him," muttered Duke. "So he's going to have another try at the compressor, eh? What a surprise he'll get."

"Won't he, though?" she agreed.

"What do you know about it?"

"Nothing, darling. And now do I get another kiss?"

"You do not," he laughed and started for the gate. "'By, pug nose, see you tonight."

"Ungrateful beast," said Fay, and tilted the nose delightfully. "Don't be too late."

A dozen conflicting emotions swirled through Duke's mind as he crossed toward Number One cylinder. He shook his head as though to clear them away and smiled when he saw Big Swede cautiously observing him from the top of the cylinder. The blond giant had finished his task below and cement was matted thick upon arms and chest. He rested against the upper rim of the iron tube and peered at Duke with eyes that were supposed to mirror bland innocence.

"You find Matt?" he asked.

"You know damn well I did," said Duke. "And when I find what you two are up to, I'll twist both of your necks. Now how about that cement—is it all right?"

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"I seal off that bottom, good," said Big Swede. "He don't leak, you bet."

"That's good. Knock off for lunch now and we'll get going on Number Three later."

There was nothing said between Duke and Terry during the short period devoted to the midday meal. Terry squatted beside the wall of an adjoining building, thoughtful, chewing sandwiches that one of his miners had purchased. The group with which he had been working gathered in a semi-circle about him and ate silently. Duke noticed this, and for a time it troubled him. It was obvious the men were taking sides, splitting into factions that favored Terry or himself.

Although Duke had said nothing of their fight, the fact that both men were battered and cut was evidence that needed no affirmation. Too, the men were not slow to notice the way both Terry and Duke avoided each other. And Duke realized that Terry had always been a favorite with the younger sand hogs. But there was nothing to be done to help matters. If he spoke to Terry he could expect a sharp answer. If he resented it, there would be a fight and a greater widening of the breach. To ignore Braid was to give rise to the suggestion that he still carried resentment for the fight of the previous night.

Duke swore softly to himself and wished he had never started the job. But that wish was of no avail. These men had invested their money, and it was up to him to get it back for them. And far more important, they had trusted him to such an extent that they were now blacklisted by all the major concerns. No—there was no turning back now.

"How's Number Two coming along, Braid?" he asked at length.

"Starting down the third section," answered Terry. "Is that fast enough —boss?"

"Plenty," answered Duke, and bit down tightly to stop the angry words that wanted to follow.

Terry's tone had been a deliberate gibe. He was still looking for trouble.

"We're ready for a cylinder in Number Three," said McCarthy. "How about takin' the air off Number One?"

WITH but a single compressor it was impossible to supply enough air to more than two cylinders. For this reason Duke had been anxious to seal off the bottom of Number One with a thin layer of concrete. With this in place and hardened, the pressure could be withdrawn from this cylinder and used on one of the others. In addition, the partitions that formed the locks in the lower sections were detachable and could be used again. This little group of sand hogs were sailing close to the wind in their effort to start a company, and equipment was scarce. Those partitions were badly needed.

"Hop down into Number One and see if that concrete is hard, Matt," said Duke. "If it is, we'll yank out the lock."

"*Hop*, sez you!" growled Matt. "And how in the name of perdition could I hop down a hundred feet? 'Tis a long climb on a full stomach, me son—but a McCarthy never sez die."

He brushed the crumbs from his trousers and crawled over the top of the cylinder. Terry and his group walked to the second cylinder and went silently about their duties. Others of the gang climbed into the remaining pits, and the afternoon's work commenced.

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Big Swede packed a number of wrenches into a cement bag and lowered them into Number One cylinder. Scarcely had the bag cleared the top when Matt's head popped over the rim and he proceeded to curse Swede whole-heartedly for not signalling the approach of the tools.

"They no could hurt you," protested Big Swede. "They land on your head, ya."

"Did you by any chance mean to infer that me head is hard?" asked Matt doubtfully.

"Quit it, you mugs!" shouted Duke. "How's that cement, Matt?"

"Solid as a rock," said Matt.

"That's what I think, ya," nodded the Swede, and grinned.

"'Twas the ceement I was talkin' of, ye walrus," yelled Matt.

"Didn't take you long to make the climb," said Duke. "Sure you looked it over?"

"Now, Duke, me son—ye're a very distrustful person. Of course I looked at it. In fact, I tried to take a bite of it and liked to break a tooth. 'Tis rock solid."

"All right, all right," said Duke. "Take the air off and you can rip out the lock."

"Now, Duke, must I remind you that I am an engineer?" asked Matt. "Me duty is at the compressor and not at the bottom of a hundred-foot hole in the ground."

"Nevertheless, that's where you're going," said Duke, and joined the group at the end pit.

Matt shook his head dolefully, opened a valve that would release the pressure in the bottom of the cylinder, and waited until the air had ceased its strident scream. He and Big Swede uncoupled the hose lines at the compressor, placed a man on watch at the cylinder edge, and climbed slowly to the bottom.

"'Tis a vile way fer a man to make a livin'," he said when they had squatted upon the roof of the upper partition.

THE only light in their circular cell was that which flickered from the electric lamps that swayed and bobbed on the long rubber cable leading from above. The high buildings around the excavation cut off the slanting rays of the sun and but a thin filter of daylight found its way down the shaft. With the absence of the air a tomblike quiet filled the tube. The sounds of the pounding compressor on the ground level came to them as a muffled thrum of a distant drum. All other noises from above were lost and the clang of their tools on metal sounded loud in their ears.

They unhooked the long black hose lines, signalled to the man above by jerking the line that had lowered the bag of tools, and ducked beneath the upper partition. On top, the hoist cable was attached to the hoses and they were drawn aloft. Down came the hook again and when it thumped upon the iron roof of the lock they cut loose the bolts that held one section in place and again signalled.

One piece after another, the disjointed partitions were h o i s t e d to the ground level. And as each piece went twisting up the narrow tube it managed to spin against an electric light and smash the bulb.

"The careless divils," raged Matt as a tinkle of glass sounded on the partition beneath which they crouched. "Do they want to plunge us into darkness, complete?"

"Purty good shots, ya," agreed Big Swede. "They don't miss those light

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at all. Maybe we best keep this one low, ya."

He unfastened a loop in the long cable and hung the lowest lamp inside the rungs that were riveted to the side of the cylinder. The hook came jangling down to them, and they attached the last section of lock and climbed down the ladder to the cement floor.

Water slapped about their ankles, and Big Swede yelped in surprise.

Matt McCarthy covered his eyes and groaned.

"Hi, what be the idea of this water?" said Big Swede. "This bottom leak, ya."

"Of course it's leakin', ye mule. The blessed ceement was not set when we took the pressure off!"

"I hear you say it was hard—like rock," argued the Swede.

"Ah, me sins have found me out! Sure, I never climbed but halfway down this plagued hole in the ground before I started up again. I guessed it was hard, and let it go at that."

"You guess wrong, ya!" said Big Swede.

TO BE CONCLUDED NEXT WEEK.

The Load on Our Minds

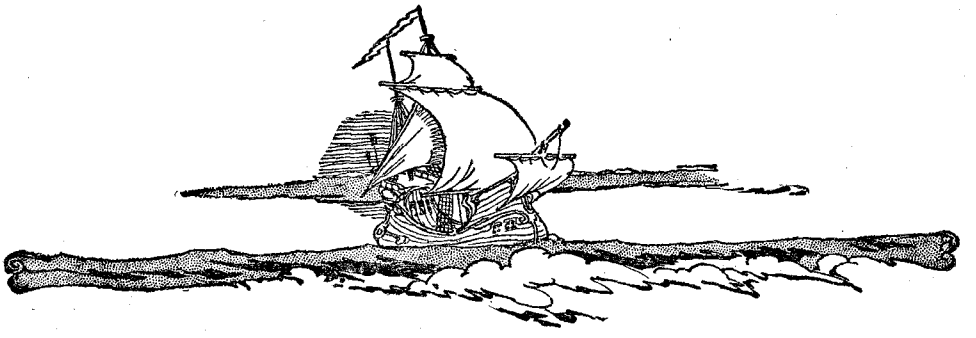
AS we struggle about our globe, the normal atmosphere pushes in, on, and around us to about 14.7 pounds to the square inch. When the barometer registers a drop of two inches, a load of two million tons of atmospheric pressure is removed from every square mile of land affected!

—*Joseph W. Skidmore.*

The Strangest Thing on Earth

ON January 17th, 1912, Dr. Alexis Carrell, of Rockefeller Institute, placed the beating heart of a chicken in a jar of warm, saline, nourishing fluid. Today the chicken's heart is still pulsing like a normal heart!

—*Frank Lewis.*



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The Sacred Valley

By MAX BRAND

Red Hawk could hear her voice praying

Neither Cheyennes nor white men would claim Red Hawk while in the Valley of Death—so he bravely played the lone wolf

LEADING UP TO THIS INSTALLMENT

AMONG the Indians of the noted Cheyenne tribe, Rusty Sabin was known as Red Hawk. Born of white parents, Rusty grew up with the Cheyennes and had a sympathetic understanding of his adopted people. Rugged, brave and handsome, Rusty became one of the leading warriors of his tribe, and often acted as representative when there was war or business with the neighboring whites.

On the occasion that Rusty is buying supplies in the town of Witherell with gold which he has mined from the Sacred Valley of the Cheyennes, he calls at the house of old Richard Lester. Charlie Galway, who is passing by, notices the gold nuggets and while stealing them murders Lester and apparently escapes unseen. Lester's daughter, Maisry, who is in love with Rusty is prostrated with grief.

The Witherell townspeople, aroused by the murder, accuse Standing Bull of the crime. Standing Bull is a Cheyenne warrior who was with Rusty at the scene of the killing. Rusty intervenes and pleads for a fair trial. When Rusty sees that the whites are not treating his friend squarely, he and Standing Bull ride off on Rusty's white stallion to their tribe. It is then, after he is safe with the Cheyennes, that Rusty takes a vow to go native and to avenge his friend's wounds.

Shortly after Rusty's return to the Cheyenne

This story began in the Argosy for August 10

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encampment, Running Elk, one of the tribal Medicine Men, declares that the Sky People have ordered a sacrifice for Standing Bull's recovery to health. So the Cheyennes sacrifice all of the treasure and supplies that Rusty had bought.

Later Running Elk, who is conniving for his own personal gain, says that the Sky People are making a further demand that Rusty be put in the Valley of Death—which means Rusty's death.

He is taken to the Valley, but Sweet Medicine in the form of a huge Owl leads him to a cave through which he escapes to the Sacred Valley.

Meanwhile Charlie Galway has proposed to Maisry Lester, but she does not accept him. Her thoughts are still with Red Hawk.

CHAPTER X.

SACRIFICE.

CHARLIE GALWAY started the next day for the distant Cheyennes. He chucked the thought of Maisry Lester over his shoulder as soon as he was outside the circle of the Witherell Hills. A long, hoarse hoot from the whistle of the river steamer was the last sound from civilization, and then he was out in the long, brown grass of the prairie. It was pale, sunburned, dry. It hurt the eyes with the strong reflection of the sun. It made the skin of his eyelids burn. A thin dust kept rising to his nostrils and made him cough a good deal the first day. Afterwards, he settled to the work. He brought on his ten animals carefully. The second day, he missed one waterhole, found a second crusted with cracking mud, and only by chance came on a bit of muddy water in the bottom of a draw. That water was what brought him through to the Cheyenne camp.

He was stopped when he was hardly in eyeshot of the white lodges and brought under guard into the village by a cluster of half a dozen young warriors. On the way, he talked with them, exercising his newly acquired Cheyenne, and they chattered back freely enough when they learned that he was a trader. For their food supply, they said, was running short in the village; and for a week not a drop of water had run past the mouth of the Sacred Valley, or at most small driblets which soon evaporated from the dry rocks of the gorge.

Disaster seemed to face the Cheyennes of this tribe. For that reason, all the more, the heart of Charlie Galway was light as he rode into the camp.

He was taken straight to the lodge of Standing Bull who, as the head chief, received all newcomers. And on a supple willow bed padded with buffalo robes, the sides of the lodge furled up to admit a free current of air, Charlie Galway saw a grim caricature of the copper giant whom he had last looked at in Witherell.

The bones of Standing Bull were hardly covered by the dry, hard muscles. His ribs lifted out like gigantic fingers with every breath he drew. A pulse beat in the sunken hollow of his throat, but it throbbed with a feeble wavering. On the naked side of Standing Bull appeared, in dull purple, the round spot where the rifle bullet had driven into his body. That bullet had come from the gun of Galway, and Galway knew it, but there was no fear that the chief might recognize him and accuse him, even if he could have known what trigger finger had launched the bullet. For the starved face of Standing Bull turned continually to this side and to that, and his purple-gray lips were parted by mutterings which made only fragments of sense.

The eyes were worst—the shadow of them, and the red stain visible beneath the lids.

The man was dying, certainly, but slowly, and again the heart of Charlie Galway was lightened.

He went to the lodge of the medicine man, next. In the tepee of Standing Bull he left merely a package of beads at which the sad-eyed squaws would hardly look. But at the home of Running Elk all was different.

An air of good cheer pervaded the tepee in spite of the unfortunate circumstances of the entire tribe. The squaws had a breezy air of conversation, and Running Elk himself deliberately admired with eye and hand the long strip of colored calico print which was unrolled. It was long enough to pass clear around the lodge, and it was a full yard in width. Running Elk

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crowed like a happy child when he saw the gaudy beauty of the pattern.

And in person he went out to supervise the trading. The goods were unpacked from the backs of the horses. Here again the guns and ammunition, the beads and the knives and hatchets were not considered very gravely, but the Indians brought out eagerly their best buffalo robes to trade in for the corn and the dried beef.

There was still food in the town, but the supply of it was dwindling rapidly. For the lack of water, unless a rain fell soon or the supply from the Sacred Valley mysteriously was increased, they soon would have to begin to kill off their horses—and a tribe of Indians dismounted was like a tribe of wolves without legs to run on.

BEFORE the loads of five horses had been disposed of, the trader had made twice the cost of the expedition. So he stood up and made a speech to this effect: That he was in his heart a brother to the Cheyennes, that he always had yearned to come among them and see some of their wisdom and hear some of their lore, and therefore, he would not sell any more of his possessions to them. He would distribute freely. He would give to the lodges where only squaws lived, widows who were helpless in the tribe.

It was a rather moving speech, and since it was followed straight way by the distribution of five horseloads of goods, the words of Charlie Galway were looked on as the sheerest of truth. Afterwards, a bearded white man dressed in all respects like one of the Cheyennes, put on a pair of spectacles and peered with earnestness into the face of the other.

"Come to my lodge and tell me what's in your mind, stranger," said the white Indian.

"What's your name, partner?" asked Galway.

"They call me Lazy Wolf. Will that suit you?"

"Anything you say," answered Galway, laughing, and went willingly with the trader.

As they passed on, Galway heard a chanting of women's voices, muffled by distance, and asked about it; and the trader answered: "That's a mean business. You take the Cheyennes most of the time and in most ways, and you'll find them a pretty upstanding people. But now and then the devil comes out of them; I mean, the devil of old customs. Those women yapping over there are getting ready to make a sacrifice of a living girl."

"Hold on!" said Galway. "Living?"

"That's what I mean. They've got the habit of thinking that in a big pinch there's nothing so good as the sacrifice of a living person."

They entered the lodge of the Lazy Wolf. It was larger than the other tepees, and instead of the white hides of buffalo cows, it was a double shell of the best canvas, the insulating air-space between the two shells acting to shut out winter cold and summer heat. Even in the middle of this hot day the interior was only mildly warm.

As they sat down in the lodge, it seemed to Galway that he never before had seen furnishings so commodious in a tent. Besides the willow beds, there were backrests, and light, folding chairs; there was a rack for fishing tackle, another for rifles and revolvers; and over the fireplace leaned a little traveling crane on which several pots of varying sizes could be hung.

"When an Indian sees this outfit, doesn't your scalp fit a bit loose on your head?" asked Galway, staring enviously at the layout.

"I never know what I'll find in the lodge," said the Lazy Wolf, grinning and stroking his short beard. "Whenever Blue Bird—that's my daughter—thinks that one of the braves or one of the squaws needs something, she gives it away if she can find it in my lodge."

"Gives it away?" echoed Galway, staring.

"That's the Indian in her," said Lazy Wolf.

"If she was a daughter of mine, I'd find a way of changing her habits!" declared Galway with a stern conviction.

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"Maybe you would," answered the trader. "But these are bad days for her. When an Indian is sad, she always starts giving things away. Love is a devilish thing, Galway."

"Oh—love, eh?" said Galway, with a shrug of his shoulders.

"Never bothered you much?" asked Lazy Wolf.

"Not a lot," said Galway.

"IT may hit you later on," said Lazy Wolf. "The Cheyenne girl I married died when Blue Bird was born. I've tried to go back and live among my own people—but I miss something when I'm away. Love is a queer thing, Galway, but you're too young to know about it, perhaps."

"Ay, maybe," said Galway. "Won't the chief she's in love with have anything to do with her?"

"It's a dead man," said Lazy Wolf. "It's Red Hawk that I'm talking about."

"Ah, you mean Rusty Sabin?"

"Did you know him?"

"A little; yes."

"Not enough to be his friend?"

"I'd call myself his friend," said Galway.

Lazy Wolf rubbed his beard into a staring confusion. He pondered and then delivered his conclusion: "Different from other people. There was no way of marking where the Indian stopped in him and the white man began. He was more credulous than a Cheyenne about a good many things, and keener than any white man about others. He hated pain but he loved battle. If you showed him a thing hard to do, he couldn't help wanting to do it. He saw the White Horse—and no other horse existed for him afterwards. Nothing in the world existed for him. He spent a year chasing that horse. And he caught it—on foot—and he caught it."

"That sounds kind of impossible," said Galway.

"A man with a heart like Rusty Sabin's—why, you can't measure what the man can do unless you can measure the heart. There was no measuring of the heart of Rusty Sabin. No man could tell what a friend he was. It was for a friend that he died. It was for a friend that he was driven out by the whites. The Cheyennes murdered him. But he didn't fight against it because he believed in the religious ceremony; he thought it was the right way of bringing health back to Standing Bull. But there's one thing he would have prevented, if he had been here today, and that is the sacrifice of a living girl to end the drought."

"Could he have stopped them?" asked Galway, curiously.

"He would have found a way," said the trader. "I don't know how. He always found a way to do what he wanted in a pinch. Ah, here they come now!"

The chanting of the women came towards them out of the distance with an accompaniment of blowing horns. It was not music. It was not even melodious noise. To Galway it breathed out a savage fury.

"You mean that they simply pick out a girl and then murder her?" asked Galway.

"They don't pick her out. There's always some girl that's willing to make the sacrifice for the sake of the tribe. Then they take her to the Valley of Death—a big box cañon that even a bird could hardly fly out of. And the girl will walk in freely. She won't have to be dragged. Afterwards, part of the Cheyennes will keep guard over the mouh of the Valley of Death and the other half will go to the entrance to the Sacred Valley, and pray Sweet Medicine to send them water to end the drought."

"It's a queer idea," said Galway. "What's in the Sacred Valley?"

"I don't know," said the trader. "No living man ever has been inside it and came out to tell what was there. An Indian would rather step into a bonfire than into the Sacred Valley."

"No one ever went inside?" demanded Galway again.

"Don't try it yourself," said Lazy Wolf. "If the Indians saw you try it, they'd knife you. If they ever heard that you'd gone inside, they'd trail you to the end of the world and get your scalp to make a sacrifice to Sweet Medicine."

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"It's as bad as all that, is it?" asked Galway, setting his fighting chin. "And no one ever dared to go inside?"

"No one. That is, excepting Rusty Sabin."

"Ah?" cried Galway. An idea had taken fire in his mind. "He went in? Rusty Sabin went in—and the Indians didn't know about it?"

"THEY knew about it, but it was different with Rusty. He was a sort of chosen spirit—a sacred man—chosen by Sweet Medicine, I mean. And he brought back to the tribe the sacred arrow, which is the most holy thing they possess to-day. He saw Sweet Medicine in the form of a huge owl."

"The devil he did! You say this as though you believed it!"

"It isn't a question of what I believe," said Lazy Wolf. "It's merely that Rusty believed it. And that was enough for me. That was enough for the Cheyennes, too."

"This here Rusty was a sort of a prophet or something, eh?" asked Galway.

"You can call him that. He was almost that," said the trader. "I've never known a man like him. I'll never find another fit to step in his shoes."

The noise of the procession began to roar in front of the lodge.

"Let's have a look at this," said Galway, and pushed open the entrance flap of the tepee.

He saw before him at the head of the rout old Running Elk himself, almost naked, streaked and flaming with paints of all colors, and with a buffalo's head on his shoulders. He danced with wild boundings; he screeched weird words and phrases which the rout behind him echoed.

There came, first of all, a dozen braves on horseback with their spears reversed, their faces blackened. Behind them, on a beautiful little black pony, rode a girl crowned with flowers and shining in the finest of soft white doeskin dresses. Her horse was led by two warriors. She herself sat on the saddle with uplifted face, smiling, her hands folded in her lap. And it seemed to the startled eyes of Galway that not even the blue and golden beauty of Maisry Lester approached the loveliness of the Cheyenne. She was not the dark copper but much lighter; there was only enough stain in her skin to give it a luminous richness. And she was the sacrifice. Galway knew that. He caught his breath at the thought of such a creature going willingly to death.

Then Lazy Wolf rushed violently past him shouting: "Blue Bird! Blue Bird!"

The girl rode on as though she had not heard. Several of the warriors who followed the sacrifice turned and put the points of their spears at the breast of the trader. He fell on his knees and began to beat his fists against his face.

CHAPTER XI.

BLUE BIRD.

THE beating of drums, the blowing of horns, and the chanting of voices poured into the Sacred Valley, so that the antelope flashed their white disks of warning and fled up towards the peaceful waters of the lake; and the huge buffalo lifted their heads to listen and let the dry grass drip down from their mouths, unchewed; the elk made their proud stand; and one of the grizzlies, as Rusty Sabin watched, stood up with his vast paws folded on his breast in an attitude very like that of prayer.

Rusty whistled. The White Horse gleamed through the brush and came dazzling out into the sunset light. He had to make a frisking turn or two before Rusty could leap onto his back; then at a dizzy gallop, like water shooting down a long flume, they swept through the Sacred Valley, over the dry meadows deep in standing pasture, through the grooves, and beside the lower pools of standing water. For the river no longer ran, and the chanting of the waterfall was silent in the valley. Only a small trickle darkened the face of the cliff where the waterfall usually fell in a white thunder.

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Near the foot of the Sacred Valley, Rusty dismounted and stood at the head of the narrow entrance gorge. The big trees arose on one side. On the other, the cavernous wall of the ravine rose in successive hollows above him.

He could hear a tumultuous uproar of instruments and chanting. And this having died down to a murmur, he recognized the voice of Running Elk, chanting to Sweet Medicine a solo which was the old Cheyenne prayer for rain.

He had an impulse to rush out among them. He was overcome with a vast desire to see their faces. The human sound of the voices, the familiar words of the prayer brought tears to his eyes. He was young, and he had been long alone.

But he turned and went back to the place where the White Horse was waiting. On the back of the stallion he returned moodily to the upper end of the valley and looked up towards the mouth of the cave of Sweet Medicine.

Would the god appear to make an answer to his worshippers? Or was Sweet Medicine hovering, now, over the Valley of Death?

He dismounted from the horse. It was the end of the day. Only a dim greenness remained around the horizon, where a big, boat-shaped moon was floating upwards.

There was no sign at the mouth of the cave. And suddenly Rusty knew that he would have to look into the Valley of Death. He lifted his hands, palm upward, and prayed silently to the god. Then he climbed the face of the rock, where he had cut, with much labor, the rough flight of steps all the way to the lip of the cave. When he reached the place, he peered earnestly into the darkness of the hollow cavern; his knees were weak and trembling.

Then he entered the cave, saying in a voice that wavered with fear: "It's I. It is Red Hawk. It is your servant. Be merciful, Sweet Medicine!"

So he went on through the thick darkness, breathing hard, feeling his way. Once he thought that a whisper ran past him, and his blood turned to ice. But at last he came to the other end of the passage and looked down into the moonlit valley. Over it hovered dim shapes, the buzzards waiting on the wing for their prey.

And in the white hollow of the cañon he saw the Indian girl, a tiny shape kneeling with hands lifted. The heart of Rusty Sabin swelled; a great stroke of blood rushed through his brain. And he swore that it was the voice of the god speaking inside him.

Therefore he climbed down the great slope of broken rocks to the floor of the ravine. Once he was there, the old shudder of horror came over him. He felt minutely small as he looked up to the towering lift of the cliffs. So it was when mere mortality measured itself against the gods. He had to stop and pray again, looking back towards that place on the western cliff from which he had seen the god issue in his usual guise, as a night owl. But there was no sign except that stroke of hot blood through his brain.

He went on again, keeping some of the big boulders between himself and the girl, until he could hear her voice, still praying: "This life which I give away to you, Sweet Medicine, is not a great gift. It is no more to you than a single bead on a moccasin is to me. Perhaps you do not want unhappy souls in your heaven. But if you will have me, I go gladly. Give me a sign, if it is your will to accept me—"

RUSTY, drawn by the words, stepped suddenly from the side of the rock. The girl, starting up from her knees, screamed. The scream stopped as though a hand had throttled it. Blue Bird fell in an odd little heap of shining white doeskin.

"She is dead," said Rusty, staring down at her. "The god has taken her!"

He was afraid to touch her. He kneeled beside the motionless body. If he laid hand on her, perhaps the god would strike him, also, and was he ready to die?

At last, steeling himself, he touched her cheek with tentative fingers. It was strangely warm. But death, after all, had

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not had time to turn her cold. He laid his hand over her heart. Through the supple softness of the deerskin he surely could feel the slight stirring of the pulse; but he could not distinguish the throbbing.

She was dead, then; and this was the way Sweet Medicine accepted the chosen souls which were offered as a sacrifice.

He lifted her and her head and arms and legs fell loosely down. He had to make a cradle of his arms to support her limp weight, with her head against his shoulder.

A thin shadow streaked over him. He heard the small whisper of wings and, looking up, saw the moon strained through the wing-feathers of a buzzard.

Since the god had accepted her, it *was* not right that she should be harried by the things of evil and go mangled to the other world. Sweet Medicine should see her as she was among the Cheyennes. The god should see the long, delicate curling of the eyelashes. He should touch this softness of flesh. Even on the blue fields of heaven the Sky People never could have seen a miracle more wonderful than the curving beauty of her lips.

Then he realized that it was for this special mission that he had been drawn, at the will of the god, out of the Sacred Valley and into the Valley of Death; it was because Sweet Medicine wished to have her borne up to his own dwelling in the rock.

He bore her to the bottom of the slope of rocks. There he rested a moment. For one made so slenderly, so light-footed, she was surprisingly heavy, he thought. Now he was climbing over the boulders, panting, straining, until he reached the top and the hidden entrance to the cave.

He had to pause there. Looking down earnestly into the face of the girl, he moved into the cave and saw the steep shadow slide over her face. It was the last he would see of her. He stood for a moment with that thought, and then went on into the tunnel. It was not easy to get her through some of the narrow and low places, but at last he came to the largest part, near the entrance on the side of the Sacred Valley. Here he kneeled and laid the body on the floor. In the darkness he found her hands and crossed them on her breast. He smoothed her hair. He put her feet together and drew down the velvet softness of the doeskin skirt. When the god, whose immortal eyes do not need the light of day, should look on her for the first time, he would cry out with astonishment at her beauty. He would cover his open mouth with his hand. And then Sweet Medicine would laugh with pleasure.

He said: "Sweet Medicine, I lift my hands to you. I have brought the sacrifice to the floor of your lodging. I hope to hear you laugh with joy when you see her. But remember, god that you are, that she is young and she is only a woman. If you come to her in the likeness of an owl with great burning eyes and a hooked beak, fear might kill her spirit a second time. Come to her as you were in the years long ago, when you walked the earth as a man, with your lance in your hand, and the wind in your hair, and the green springtime following you over the prairies."

A murmur whispered, beneath him: "Red Hawk . . ."

"It is I!" exclaimed Rusty. "Blue Bird, where are you? How far away are you? Where is your spirit walking? Can you see me from heaven?"

"Am I dead?" said the girl.

"YES, yes!" cried Rusty. "You are dead. Only your voice has been put into your throat for a moment to give me a last message! Do you find yourself in the high blue of the Happy Hunting Grounds?

"I seem to be in thick darkness," she murmured. "It's as though I had been falling . . ."

"Is the god sending you back to earth?" cried Rusty.

"I don't know. I thought I was in the Valley of Death and then I saw you—and I knew that you were a ghost. Where are we?"

"We are on the earth, in the house of Sweet Medicine. Have no fear. Has your

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spirit really returned to you? Does the god wish you to live again?"

He laid his hand over her heart. Unquestionably there was a steady pulsation.

"Blue Bird, we both are living!" shouted Rusty, suddenly. "Sweet Medicine took you away and gave you back again when I prayed to him . . . Shall I carry you, or can you stand . . . So? . . . Walk close to me. Keep one hand out to ward off the wall of the cave. There—you can see the moonlight ahead of us . . ."

"How can you be flesh and warm blood?" asked the girl. "They carried you to the Valley of Death."

"When the god wills it, what is life or death?" asked Rusty, laughing with joy. "He takes and he gives again. He made me go to you; he made me carry you to his house; and there he breathed on you while I prayed. I heard a whisper go by me. It was the unseen god. He touched you when I could not see. He laid his finger on your lips, and you began to breathe. He touched your heart and it beat once more. And he gave me happiness. you feel it also?"

"If this were the blue path across the sky and we were walking it together, I could not be happier," said the girl.

They stood at the mouth of the cave.

"Do you see?" he asked her.

"What is it? I never have seen such a valley."

"Hush! This is the Sacred Valley."

She uttered a cry and caught up her hands across her eyes.

"Shall I die because I have seen it?" she asked.

"You will *live* because you have seen it. It is Sweet Medicine who has brought you here. This is his will and pleasure. Look again!"

She slowly drew down her hands from her eyes.

"How is it with you now?"

"My eyes drink in happiness. My soul tastes it," she said. "All the prairies are burned and dry, but see how much water Sweet Medicine keeps here in his hand! Will he pour it out upon the Cheyennes before they die of thirst, and before they have killed all their horses?"

"He will save his people," said Rusty, confidently. "And I think that I see how he will do it! Come down with me. Be careful. The steps in the rock are not cut very deep. And yet if you fell, I think that the god would spread his wings under you. Your spirit is fresh from heaven; that is why I feel such a delight to be with you!"

CHAPTER XII.

SWEET MEDICINE'S ANSWER.

THEY stood by the lake. The water was still. The moonpath lay broad and bright before them and the stars looked up from either side.

"Red Hawk, I am not dead?" whispered the girl. "This must be heaven, and you are no ghost beside me!"

"Ghosts have no shadows," he told her. "And see our reflections at our feet."

"Is that whispering the wind in the trees?"

"It may also be the god," said Rusty. "I don't know, except that when he passes I feel the wind blow through my spirit."

"And you are not afraid?"

"He is a father and protects me."

"Will he never appear before you?"

"Yes, in the early morning or the evening, or often on a moonlight night like this. He comes as a great, wide-winged owl."

"*Ai! Ai!* Do not call him. I am afraid."

"There is nothing to fear. He loves me. He will keep harm far away from everything that is dear to me."

"Ah—do you say that with your heart or with your lips only?"

"I say it from my heart, of course. Look!"

A huge buffalo bull came from among the trees, waded into the lake, belly deep, and drank. He was not seven steps away from them.

"Shall we run?" breathed the girl.

But he answered in a calm voice that

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was not lowered: "There is no reason to be afraid. The buffalo are the wise souls of dead warriors whom Sweet Medicine loved. He brought them here and gave them happiness in the Sacred Valley."

The big bull, lifting his head, turned it slowly towards them. Water streamed in dribblings from his muzzle. His eyes were two dangerous little points of brightness under the shag of hair on his brow. He blew out a great breath and darkened the water with the wind of his breathing.

"Ah, how beautiful!" said the girl, still whispering. "See how silken fat his flanks are! And his horns are polished; they are waxed and polished more than war bows."

"If you whisper, the soul of the dead man will be angry," said Rusty. "I think he is angry now—ha!—you see that whispering is bad manners when there are the spirits of the brave near us!"

The bull, lurching suddenly out of the water, turned towards the two with lowered head . He stamped the ground till it shook under the foot and he rolled his big, blunt horns threateningly to one side.

"Run—he will charge!" cried the girl.

Rusty lifted his right hand in the signal of greeting.

"Oh, brother," he said, "forgive her for foolishness. It is very hard for a woman to be wise. Silly little things keeping blowing into their minds like bright autumn leaves on the wind. But this one is a chosen spirit. She has been to the heaven of Sweet Medicine. See!—she is now alive and standing in the Sacred Valley."

The buffalo turned with a final sway of the head and strode away into the brush. His footfalls died out.

"If that was the soul of a warrior, he must have been a great chief," said the girl. "How could you endure to stand so close? What if he had struck his horns into your body because he was angry about my foolish whispering?"

"That would have been the will of Sweet Medicine, and there's no use trying to avoid what the god determines.

"I'm almost afraid of you, when you talk like that."

"You should not be. Do you hear, far, far away, the horns blowing and the moan of the people, praying for rain? They have been there since the sunset. My poor countrymen!"

"Do you pity?"

"My heart aches for them."

"But they drove you out to the Valley of Death."

"That was the malice of Running Elk and the simplicity of the braves who could believe him. But in all of that, they were working the will of Sweet Medicine. He wished to bring me back to the Sacred Valley."

"How did he take you from the Valley of Death to the Sacred Valley?"

"I WAS ready to die, and then I saw Sweet Medicine in the form of the great owl fly out of the cliff across the valley. His spirit led me through the rock as I led you."

"Ah, how wonderful. My heart turns cold when you talk like this. To live as you do with a god in every day of your life must be a glorious thing."

"You're trembling," he said.

"The wind is a little chilly," she said.

"Sit closer to me. Are you warmer now?"

"Ah, yes!"

"Are you happy?"

"Yes."

"Do you know how it is with me? Joy keeps flashing up through my heart like swift trout out of shadow into golden sunshine. Is it so with you?"

"Yes."

"Then should we be married?"

"Yes."

"There are no people here to make the ceremony," said he.

"Well, if you lift me in your arms and carry me over the threshold of your lodge, that would be a marriage, in the Sacred Valley."

"Is it true?" he asked, with his head lifted. "Sweet Medicine, give me an answer. Come swiftly into the valley and give me an answer."

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He waited through a long moment. The sky remained empty, filled only with the moonlight as with a shining mist. The girl, as he watched, had lifted her hand as though to ward off an impending stroke.

"There is no sign," said he, slowly.

"Look back at me," pleaded the girl. "Is it really Sweet Medicine about whom you're thinking? Or are you remembering the white girl?"

"Yes. I think of her, also."

"She is the one you care about. I never would be the real wife. I would only be the squaw for using the flesh-scraper on the hides, and cutting wood, and carrying water. She would sit in the lodging and bead the moccasins, and comb your hair, and sit with your head in her lap laughing at the poor slave, Blue Bird, that went drudging back and forth."

He said nothing. She began to weep. She doubled up her hands into fists. Her weeping did no more than give pauses to her torrent of speech.

"I AM only a worthless thing because I have a red skin. She is white and golden and blue. She belongs to your own people."

"The Cheyennes are my own people," said he. "Now I would like to comfort you, because you talk like an angry child. But there is a little truth in what you say. I *do* think, still, of Maisry Lester. But she belongs to a life to which I can never return. She is parted from me. I never shall see her again."

"Do you mean that?" asked the Blue Bird, hungrily. "Yes, I mean it. She would not be my wife, if I had another. White men only may marry once."

"If a great chief had only one wife, then he never would have many comforts in his tepee."

"That may be true," said he. "But also, if she came into the Sacred Valley it would not be sacred to her. Sweet Medicine would be no more than a night owl. For the whites have no belief in anything. However, she never would sit and cry like a child."

"I'm sorry. Forgive me. And I think that if Sweet Medicine sent me to you all the way from heaven, as you say, then you should take me."

"I never wanted anything so much. *Ah hai,* the tears of a woman come and go and have no meaning. Your lips are still trembling, but now you commence to laugh. Why are you laughing at me?"

"Because the god has poured into me such happiness that it overflows. *Ai, ai, ai!* I could cry out to the moon. I could sweep the stars out of the sky and weave them into a chain like flowers. The moonlight shines through me. If the gods looks down now from the sky, he sees me shining like the face of his lake. Sweet Medicine, do not let evil come because I sit here laughing, while my people are mourning and begging you to send the rain. Sweet Medicine, be merciful. Red Hawk, will the god be angry with me?"

"I don't think so. This moment you are so delightful that the Sky People must be starting out of their sleep and find that they are dreaming of the earth-dwellers. They must be looking down into the Sacred Valley and beginning to smile. Let the morning come quickly, and then Sweet Medicine will give us the answer.

"What answer?"

"He will say whether he wants you to stay here with me or to go away."

"Ah, will he speak to you with words?"

"He will take the food from your hand as he does from mine when he is pleased. But if he avoids you, then you must go away."

"Tell me another thing."

"Yes. Whatever you please."

"Tell me the best words to use in order to pray to the god."

CHAPTER XIII.

LITTLE MIRACLE.

ALL night through, the chanters maintained the prayer to the god. But by turns, the groups of warriors danced in the moonlight, or chanted, or

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beat on the drums, or drew howling noises from the horns.

Still, when the moon died in the east before the growing light of the sun, there was not a sign of answer from the careless god. There was not a shadow of a cloud on the horizon, and another summer day was promised, as brazen hot as the ones which had scorched the prairies before. Still, when the braves looked towards Running Elk for a permission to stop the entreaties, the long-faced old man would make no sign.

And inside the valley, far up towards the holier end, beside the shining edge of the lake and opposite the cave of Sweet Medicine, the Blue Bird stood up with a living rabbit grasped in her strong young hands. Behind her, Red Hawk whistled a long, shrill note, and now the miracle happened, drawing a cry of fear from the lips of the girl. For she saw, on the lip of the cave above her, a huge owl, greater than any eye ever had beheld before. It extended its wings. It rushed down through the air towards her. She heard the thin whispering of those furred wing-feathers. She saw the great hooked talon drawn up towards the soft feathers of the belly. She saw the round shining of the eyes. So a god would take food from her hand and bless her!

But in the last moment the owl swerved. Its talons reached out and the powerful leg behind them as though of their own volition they still would have seized on the rabbit. But the wings slid the great bird rapidly away.

The cry of the girl slashed through the brain of Red Hawk. She fell on her knees and let the rabbit go bounding away, its ears flattened by the speed of its running. And so, her arms thrown up, the girl cried out after the owl.

But the bird, veering without a wing-flap, swerved suddenly back towards the cave and disappeared into the mouth of it.

Red Hawk picked up from the ground a little fluffy owl-feather which had fluttered down close to the Blue Bird. He put it in her hair sadly.

"You must go," he said. "You see that the god is not angry if you do as he wishes at once. He has given you a token of his favor. Take it. Let that make you happy. Perhaps on some other day you may come back into the Sacred Valley and live here forever. Or is his anger with me, also? We shall see!"

He picked up another rabbit, its four feet tied securely together, and once more he whistled. And again the mighty owl dipped off the edge of the cliff and slid through the air with faultless ease. Right down he came, struck the talons of one foot into the offered rabbit, and veered away again to disappear inside the cave.

The girl began to beat her face with her hands and cry out: "He will not accept me! He turns his face from me! I want to die! I don't want to live!"

"Think how the Cheyennes will admire you and wonder at you," said Red Hawk. "No other Indian ever has been inside the Sacred Valley and gone out alive again. You went in at the Valley of Death; you will come out from the Sacred Valley with the token of the god worn in your hair. Why, Blue Bird, you will become at once almost greater medicine than Running Elk."

"But I shall be alone," said the girl. "I'd rather die here in the Valley than live in any other place."

"There is the will of the god to think about," he told her. "He sent you back from death into life. Now he is sending you back to the Cheyennes. Will you stop and argue with him?"

Afterwards, he caught trout and roasted them over the coals of a quick fire. He wrapped the fish in broad leaves and when the leaves were seared and rotten with the flame, he took out the fish. They were so tender that he could lift out the frame of bones. It was a delicacy.

The Blue Bird, as she ate, fell into a happy dream. There was so much to see that she could not turn her head everywhere. It was all sacred. The cliffs, the trees, the grass, all was different from the beings in the outer world. And the animals moved with more beauty, more peaceful

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dignity than any others she had seen.

He took Blue Bird into the house he had built. She was overcome with wonder; and when he tried to explain how he had done each part of the work, she merely shook her head.

"Ah, yes—with your own hands, but with Sweet Medicine standing invisible beside you. Sweet Medicine lifted the stones of the dam, also. You could not have done it without him."

"Perhaps not," he agreed.

IT was time for her to go. The sun was up. Wheeling flights of birds rose out of the trees and flew down the valley.

"They are pointing you the way you must take," said he.

She had grown composed.

"My grandmother told me," she said, "that men are made for hunting and battle and glory, but women are meant for pain. *Ai, ai!* I have breathed in such pain, when I think of leaving the Valley, that my heart is swollen and great with it. Only tell me this: Shall I see you again before I die?"

He touched the owl feather in her hair.

"This is the proof that you belong to Sweet Medicine," he said. "Therefore I surely shall see you again."

He called the White Horse and helped the girl onto the back of the stallion. The rustling of her white dress maddened him. The White Horse danced and curvetted, ready to fling her to the ground.

She clung to the windy mane. And the voice of Red Hawk was half stopped with happy laughter as he controlled the great horse with words; for he thought that he never before had seen a picture so beautiful as the golden loveliness of the girl mounted on the silken white flashing of the stallion.

So they went down the Valley side by side, the White Horse growing quieter. At the mouth of the entrance ravine they halted and she slipped to the ground.

He said: "When you go among the people, tell them to continue their chanting, because Sweet Medicine will send them water. He has told me what to do to answer their prayers. Tell the people that you have seen the god and that he has given you the feather as a token that you belong to him; he has accepted you. But if you speak of anything else that you saw in the Sacred Valley, you surely will die."

She stepped close to him until her forehead leaned against his shoulder. He listened to her breathing in a pause of the weary chanting that still sounded beyond the entrance rocks.

"Are you a little unhappy because I have to go?" she asked.

"I am so sad," he said, "that my throat aches."

He lifted one hand to the sky. "Sweet Medicine," he said, "go with her; bring her happiness; lead her again to me or me to her. Fill my mind and my hands with many things to do so that my heart shall not be empty when I remember her."

"Is there a token? Is there an answer?" she asked.

He said: "The wind bends the feather in your hair towards me. It is the answer. My prayer shall be granted."

She looked at him for a moment with a shining face. Afterwards, her head lifted, she went slowly down the narrow of the gorge.

Red Hawk went back up the valley on the back of the stallion.

He began to roll from the places the big rocks with which he had built the wall of the dam.

TO BE CONTINUED NEXT WEEK.

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Cure for a Headache

Little things like murder and double crossing his partner didn't trouble Hugo Lubitz —but he had a slight headache coming up

By HOUSTON DAY

Lubitz struck again as the man fell

HUGO LUBITZ'S hand tightened about the hilt of the knife and his breath came faster. Ahead of him, scarcely ten feet away, walked Huang Ping-hui. For ten minutes he had been following the patriarchal Chinese, and now for the first time they were alone.

The dogs in the winding, odorous alley scarcely stirred as the Chinese passed, but the strange scent of the white man roused them from their troubled sleep. They sniffed at his feet and growled, curious, but half afraid. Few foreign devils had ventured within the ancient walls of Ning-ting.

Quickening his pace, Lubitz overtook the Chinese. He had no compunctions about the murder he was about to commit. True, the hand that held the knife trembled, and his knees felt wobbly, but it was excitement and greed that set his nerves a-tingling, not nervousness.

The Chinese had to die. Lubitz had decided that fifteen minutes ago in the home of Sin Lo. Under his arm the Chinese car-

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ried the jade dragon of Kwang-su, and hadn't his partner, Neil Sevier, admitted the dragon was worth twenty thousand dollars?

His lips curled at the thought of Sevier. His partner made him sick; he had the scruples of an old woman. They had traveled six hundred miles through the bandit-infested wastes of Shensi province, lured on by the description of the jade dragon, and now Sevier was ready to turn back, just because the Chinese that owned it didn't want to sell.

At the moment Lubitz was glad that Huang Pin-hui had refused their offer. The Chinese was within striking distance, and Lubitz glanced over his shoulder to make sure he was not observed.

There was no one in sight. He covered the last few feet with a spring. His right hand came back, and aiming his blow at the point where the neck joins the shoulders, he struck. The Chinese gasped, but blood strangled his cry. The bow had severed the jugular, and the vertebrae of his neck as well. Lubitz struck again as the man fell, and left the knife in the wound.

Snatching up the bundle from the inert arms of the body, he again looked up and down the narrow alley. No one had seen him.

So far, everything had gone just as he planned. The knife he had used belonged to Neil Sevier. The pistol he drew from his pocket also belonged to his partner. He fired three bullets into the motionless body, and stepping around a convenient corner, he vanished into the darkness as the startled cries of Chinese pouring into the alley mingled with the howls of the dogs.

Back in their quarters, Lubitz's eyes glistened with elation when he saw that Sevier was asleep. The house where they had found shelter had only two rooms. In one slept Sin Lo, his wife, and their four children. He and his partner occupied the other.

MOVING quietly so as not to awake Sevier, Lubitz replaced the automatic in his partner's holster, then picked up the jug of rice brandy. He took a long drink to steady his nerves and began unwrapping the package he had taken from the dead Chinese. He would have to find a place to hide his loot before the soldiers came to take Sevier away.

The Chinese have a wholesome respect for evil spirits, and through the centuries they have devised many ways to confuse them. Their towns have double gates and winding, crooked streets to prevent the demons from finding their way about. Everyone knows a spirit cannot turn a corner. But these twists and turns might also confuse a white man who set out to follow a patriarchal Chinese with nothing to distinguish him from his fellows but the bundle he carried.

This thought came swiftly to Lubitz, and he swore aloud. The package was unwrapped, and instead of the jade dragon of Kwang-su he saw that his loot consisted of a tightly bound bundle of rags and a few pieces of firewood. He had killed the wrong man.

"Damn," he muttered, flinging the bundle of sticks and rags into the corner, "These Chinks all look alike."

He took another drink, and then another, and when the soldiers came he was seated on the floor with the half empty jug between his knees.

Chattering excitedly, the soldiers pulled Sevier's automatic from its holster beside him, smelled the fresh, sweet odor of the smokeless powder, and then dragged his partner to his feet.

Lubitz turned his head to hide a smile of exultation. The Colt automatic in Sevier's holster was probably the only one ever seen in Ning-ting. The Chinese, soldiers especially, had stared at it curiously and greedily, according to their nature, when the two white men had arrived that afternoon.

Feigning surprise he demanded of Sevier: "What the devil have you been doing? Who'd you shoot?"

Sevier wasn't struggling in the grip of the soldiers. He knew that it would be foolish to resist. Years among the yellow men had tinged his philosophy with the fatalism of the East.

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He turned toward his partner coolly. "So you've double crossed me, eh? O.K., Lubitz, but watch out."

"That's your guess," said Lubitz, but he made no attempt to interfere as the soldiers led Sevier away. Waiting only until he was sure they were out of earshot, he laughed long and heartily. Chang Sung would make short work of executing Sevier, he knew, and he wasn't sorry.

Since starting their trading venture six months ago they had acquired valuable bits of ancient jewelry, several pieces of priceless Ming, enough in fact, to make one man independent for life. It was the year of the Rabbit, famine was abroad in the land, and there were many bargains to be had.

Lubitz chuckled as he took another drink of the fiery liquor, and as it began to go to his head he sang loudly and raucously. It made him happy to think of the money he would have to spend once he got back to civilization. Their caravan, with its guard of hired soldiers, was camped just outside the gates. He would leave the first thing in the morning.

HE took a long drink, and then another one, and a couple of hours later a patrolling group of soldiers chattered wonderingly at the strange sight of a foreign devil staggering through the winding streets making weird and ear-torturing sounds and brandishing an empty jug.

Like all efficient Chinese troopers they first searched him thoroughly, appropriating his tobacco pouch, his watch and the signet ring from his finger. His shirt, trousers, and shoes were stripped from him next, and after they had agreed on a division of their loot, they took him to the mud-walled hut that served as a jail.

It was daylight when Hugo Lubitz awoke, his head was splitting and he had a horrible thirst. A brilliant shaft of light from a small window high in the wall seared his eyes and he shut them quickly.

"So they've got you, too, eh? Good."

He recognized Sevier's voice and sat up. The events of the night came back to him. He looked around the small room. Sevier was lying on the floor. Lacking clothes when he had been hauled from his blankets, he had covered himself against the chill of the night as well as he could with the straw that littered the bare ground in their cell.

"Yeah," said Lubitz. "I guess I got pinched, too. Drunk and disorderly. Ouch, what a head!"

"Celebrating the trick you played on me, eh?"

"Sure. Why not?" Lubitz sneered. "It was a good one, wasn't it?"

He heard the sing-song voices of the guards, and then the jangling of a chain as the door swung open. Three Chinese soldiers entered. They were clad in ragged cotton garments with rags wound turban-wise around their heads. Lubitz arose to greet them.

"So long," he said to Sevier. "I'll be waiting in the square to see you get yours."

"You dirty rat," said Sevier.

Lubitz started to laugh, but stopped quickly. Every motion sent dizzying waves of pain through his head. "Damn that rice brandy," he muttered.

His guards led him to Chang Sung, the commander, who stood a little apart from the group in the center. It seemed as if every Chinese in the town had gathered in the square in front of the jail.

Chang Sung barked an order and the soldiers stopped directly in front of him. Lubitz recognized his signet ring, glistening on the commander's forefinger. Sevier's automatic was suspended from Chang Sung's belt by a bit of string, although the holster was also strapped around his waist. The leader of the soldiers was tall for a Chinese, with a flat, round face and piercing black eyes.

Beside Chang Sung stood a huge Mongolian, stripped to the waist to give him arms free play. He was resting his weight on a long, two-edged sword. It was a headsman's sword, Lubitz knew, and then he understood. Sevier was to be decapitated at once.

The impulse to laugh came again, but his temples throbbed warningly, so instead he attempted to look concerned. The exe-

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cutioner appeared strong and efficient. One swing would be enough to sever his partner's head from his body cleanly and quickly.

Lubitz's lips twitched. "I'm glad it's *his* head they're cutting off," he muttered.

HE heard the commander speak and he concentrated, trying to understand. He recognized the word *sha*. It meant kill. The Chinese was probably lecturing him on the heinous nature of his partner's offense. The lecture droned on.

He glanced around the square. The Chinese were jabbering excitedly as if at a festival. In front of him was the first gate. In its arch he saw four little bamboo cages, each holding a dried, shriveled head.

Lubitz grinned. There would be a fifth cage in the arch within an hour, and he made a mental note to salute it as he passed through.

He had started to turn away when his eyes strayed over the wall. He jumped as if he had been prodded with a knife. On the other side of the wall, silhouetted at the top of a hill, he saw their caravan. There was no mistaking the six heavily burdened horses, or the figure of Sevier, mounted on his shaggy pony at their head.

He blinked his eyes and felt the blood drain from his face. "Hey," he exploded. "There's the man you're going to execute. He's getting away!"

Chang Sung spoke in passable English. "You kill, you die," he said.

Lubitz gasped. For a moment the sickening throb of his head made him faint.

"I didn't kill the chink. It wasn't my pistol. You got the wrong man."

Chang Sung looked at Lubitz curiously, and then nodded to the soldiers. Two of them grasped the white man by the wrist and elbow, stretching his arms out behind him, and forced him to his knees. The swordsman stepped forward.

Lubitz was frantic. His headache was almost forgotten, but not quite. Wincing, he realized it would never ache again.

"You got the wrong man, I tell you. That was Sevier's knife in his back, and that's his automatic hanging from your belt."

Chang Sung shrugged his shoulders.

"Don't you remember," Lubitz cried. "The other man had the pistol. I was the one who was drunk. That's my ring on your finger. Don't you see? You're killing the wrong man!"

Chang Sung didn't reply at once, but Lubitz saw the light of recognition in his eyes and took new hope. The Chinese had seen them when they arrived in Ning-ting; coveted both his signet ring and Sevier's automatic. Now Lubitz knew the Chinese remembered him. For a moment the joy that swelled in his breast almost smothered him. He was saved.

The Chinese glanced down at the ring. It glittered in the sunlight, and he inhaled proudly. He was a simple soul, not given to attempts at concealing his thoughts, and Lubitz read the workings of his mind. Chang Sung, he knew, was reluctant to part with the ring.

Lubitz laughed aloud. The Chinese could keep the ring. It was a small price to pay for his head.

Chang Sung twisted the stone so that it sparkled in the sun, and admiration and pride of possession brightened his button-like eyes. At the same time he nodded toward the Mongolian.

"Yes," he said. "I remember now. You are right. The other man should be beheaded, and you should be set free. It is most unfortunate—because if I set you free now I should have to give back your ring."

Lubitz felt limp with relief. It had been a narrow escape. He started to rise to blurt out his thanks, but the two soldiers who grasped his arms only tightened their grip. For a moment he did not understand, but a second later he cried out in terror when he saw the shadow of the executioner's sword as it cleaved the air.

Chang Sung sighed. "It is most unfortunate," he said regretfully, "but the dead beggar's relatives won't know it was a mistake. All white men look alike to them."

THE END

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David Falloner, fighting a master of guile in the South Seas, hears his own death sentence pronounced

It was Falloner who led the charge

The Blackbirds Sing

By DENNIS LAWTON

LEADING UP TO THIS CONCLUDING INSTALLMENT

DAVID FALLONER went to the South Seas when they were young, but he didn't go of his own accord. He fled a Western ranch town when he thought he had killed a man, went to San Francisco, and was shanghaied aboard the clipped ship Inverarry by its master, Captain Tenby, and Jimmy Birch, the mate.

The Inverarry was driven by a storm into the harbor of Taholu, where Falloner deserted the ship, swam ashore, and became a prime favorite with the natives, including King Kopana, and Sahi, his son, and Lavia Laia, his daughter.

Tenby, a pirate and slave trader, tried to abduct a number of the natives, but was stopped by Falloner. The French authorities then notified Tenby that he must gain the island for France or be hung as a "blackbirder."

Tenby set about this in two ways—he enlisted and armed the Haggari, the wild hillmen of the island, and led them in an attack on the village of Taholu; also, he debauched the elder son of King Kopana, young Nito, with presents and liquor, and got Nito to seize Kopana's spear, the emblem of kingly authority.

Angus Campbell, trader on the island, and his daughter Penelope sided with Falloner.

This story began in the Argosy for July 20

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CHAPTER XXVIII.

THE PEARL.

AT the gate of Falloner's fort Nito stood and watched the double armloads of spears, clubs, bows and rifles being carried to the interior to be heaped around the fat old king.

The bearers of the arms laid down their burdens, saluted Kopana, and instantly sped out of the fort and down the village street to join in the whoopings of the Taholans of the town.

The nostrils of Nito worked. He groaned aloud to Tenby, who was at his side:

"Do you hear all the shouting? Do you hear the singing? They are yelling the name of Malakola because he has been a good war-chief. They are calling on Sahi as a brave prince. Most of all they are yelling for Imai Deapa, Imai Deapa, the white man. But no one speaks of Nito! When they pass me, their eyes avoid even my shadow on the ground as though it would be poison in their minds. Ai! I am unhappy!"

"As long as you have the spear, you are as good as king," said Tenby. "What do you care for the inside of their minds when their hands have to do what you tell them? Don't be a foolish fellow, Nito. Every rifle and most of the spears of the Taholans have been brought here at your command."

"What good is it to be king for only one day?" asked Nito.

"And why should you? Why not keep the spear?"

"Because at sunset, if I still had the stolen spear, my right hand would turn to stone. Unless I cut it off, the stoniness would creep over my body little by little until I was dead."

"Come, Nito, that could never happen," said Tenby.

"It *has* happened. There is a stone in the forest that once was a prince who stole the sacred spear from his father."

"Does the stone still look like a man?" asked Tenby.

"No," answered Nito. "But every one knows that once it was a living prince."

"I can use a magic to stop you from turning to stone," declared Tenby.

"Maybe you can," answered Nito, "but what a madman I would be if I took the chance. No, I must not have the spear any more when the sun goes down—and tomorrow I shall be walking through this place like a stranger with a terrible taboo, so that no one dares to look."

"There is Sahi now," said Tenby. "And those are some of the trained riflemen of Imai Deapa, aren't they?"

"Yes," said Nito. "They always follow Sahi. They are like so many hands and feet to run and work for him."

"Well, they have lost their rifles. Now tell me, Nito—while you still have that spear, would it be strong enough to make even Sahi and those warriors there, who all love Imai Deapa—would it be strong enough to make them do anything you command?"

"Of course," said Nito.

"Then command Sahi to go with his men and arrest the white man—arrest Falloner, Imai Deapa, whatever you choose to call him."

"Tell Sahi to go and seize his friend? Tell the warriors to arrest the man who gave them a great victory and made you—and all the Haggari and me—made us all run like squawking chickens?"

"Are you afraid to try?" asked Tenby, combing one of his silver-white sideburns with his fingers.

"No," said Nito, through his teeth. "But now I see that only the white men know how to be bad! . . . I'll give that command and we'll see if this is really a sacred spear!"

THE hills and the bay of Taholu echoed with the shouting and the laughter of the natives, with only a few notes of sorrow breaking through where some wailer for the dead of the battle broke off triumphing in order to perform the dutiful screeching, immediately to return to the exulting shout. But in the house of Angus Campbell there was a troubled silence.

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Campbell himself, walking up and down the soft mats that covered the floor, turned continually with a quiet eye of happiness towards his daughter. The previous day she had been so lost to him that every glimpse of her was a new pleasure. But even Campbell's face was clouded except when his glance turned to the girl. She herself brooded gloomily on the floor, looking only now and then towards Falloner who was stretched out on the matting with his eyes closed and his hands folded under his head.

His great chest rose and fell regularly, as though he were asleep; but the frown on his forehead showed that his mind was turning the problem ceaselessly. Lavia Laia, sitting beside him, was making it her business to rub that frown away with the soft palm of her hand, while she sang a sleeping song in a barely audible voice. It was not right for a royal princess of Taholu to lean over any man in this manner, but Lavia Laia had grown shameless.

"Angus," said Falloner, "put a thought in my head. Give me a starting point."

"Hush!" whispered Lavia Laia. "It is time for you to rest."

She took from her head a garland of bright flowers and laid them over the eyes of Falloner. He smiled, very faintly, and let the flowers blind him.

"I try to think," said Campbell, "but it's no good. I keep coming back to the starting point. The Haggari are beaten to a pulp. Next to Kopana, you ought to be the greatest man on the island today. But that devil of a Tenby has stolen a march on us."

"My fault," said Falloner. "I should have let them spear the rat up there at Yolulla Posella."

"You should," agreed Campbell. "If he had died there why, the Inverarry would be on her way out of the bay by now. Taholu would be in your pocket, David. Instead of that, Tenby has Kopana in his hands. That worthless brat of a Nito has the spear of the king; the rifles are gone except the pair that you and I have, and God alone can tell what will happen next!"

"Be still!" whispered Lavia Laia, turning and making a signal. "You see? I have rubbed the frown out of his forehead, and soon he will be asleep."

The roll of the Taholan language made a quiet music in the ears of Falloner, but he sighed.

"Penelope," he said, "will you tell her to leave me alone?"

"I can't do that without hurting her," said Penelope. "But don't you enjoy having her beside you there?"

"How unfair you are!" said Falloner. "Is it because you still think that I ought to marry a native girl?"

Penelope was silent. Lavia Laia touched David's lips.

"Be still!"

Falloner was silently waiting for Penelope's remark to his last question, and Lavia Laia turned to Campbell.

"You see?" she said. "He has made all the Haggari crouch in the grass like frightened birds; he has made the whole forest be still with fear of him; but still I, Lavia Laia, can make him lie as still as though he were afraid!"

Penelope laughed a bit, but her laughter made little sound. And here a shadow crossed the threshold.

IT was old Matuko with young Kalou, two fishermen. Matuko carried in his hand a seashell filled with a nest of seaweed brighter than grass and fine as thread.

"We know that the daughter of the king is here," said old Matuko. "We have a little gift for her. Kalou paid for it! Hai! How he paid for it! You see that his hand is hurt? His side was cut, too, when he dived, but he found one of the pretty little white pebbles such as you used to wear around your neck."

Matuko was entering the room, giving each person in turn a salute that was filled with a sort of graceful humility. Lavia Laia had been frightened away from the side of the white man. She stood now, panting a little with excitement.

"Show it to me, Matuko!" she said. "Ah, poor Kalou! How I am sorry for your hurts! Your hand is swollen, too. But in

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my bundle in Kopana's house I have a charm to take fever out of the flesh. Come with me and I'll give it to you."

The boy looked straight at her, overcome with admiration, and could not help exclaiming:

"Ah, Lavia Laia, when the sun is shining and making the coral reef red, what a pretty fish you would make in the sea and what a lucky fisherman to catch you!"

She looked down at herself, laughing. Holding out one arm a little she turned it right and left, enjoying the slender grace of it.

"If I ever turn into a fish, shall I tell you first, Kalou?" she asked.

"Yes, tell me!" he nodded.

They began to join one another in laughter. Falloner took the flowers from across his eyes and raised his weight on one elbow.

"Now let me see the white stone," said Lavia Laia.

Old Matuko pulled back a top layer of the seaweed and showed in the hollow of a little nest the gleam of a big pearl.

Campbell exclaimed violently; Penelope started up; even Falloner muttered an exclamation of astonishment as he saw the size and the apparent perfection of the jewel. Lavia Laia, before she more than glanced at the pearl, ran her eyes over the faces of the three white people. Then she took the jewel and went to the door with Matuko and Kalou, still thanking them.

When they were gone she came back in a whirling dance that kept her short skirt spinning and whispering. She stopped with a sudden stamp of the foot before Falloner and held up the pearl to him in the cup of both her hands.

"No, Lavia Laia," he said to her. "That's a beautiful thing. It's worth so much money that—well, with that one pearl you could put a rifle into the hands of every man on Taholu. Keep that pearl, my dear. It's worth more than the whole village of Taholu and all the houses, all the knives, hatchets and spears. All is gathered into that one drop of moonlight."

The girl, brooding over him with half-closed eyes, began to smile. Usually her voice was a fresh rush of gaiety like spring water; now she spoke softly:

"It takes a big heart to make a gift freely. Only a few hearts open so wide that a gift goes happily out from them. Look—my heart is open like that. . . . If this were larger than the shell that hid it, I would give it to you. If it were too large for me to hold in my hands, if it were filling my arms like a great, cold moon and pouring chill light over me, still I would give it to you. Take it, Imai Deapa!"

His troubled eyes wandered past her until he found Penelope, who was saying:

"Yes, take it! Take it!" forming the words with soundless lips.

Falloner took the pearl and kissed the hands that offered it; and Lavia Laia stood happily, looking into the hollow of her hands as though they still held treasures.

Falloner said: "I'm going to step outside for a moment and look at the bay and see the Inverarry stuck in the middle of the harbor like a question mark in the middle of a page. We'll never be rid of our troubles until we're rid of that clipper."

He walked out the door, but the bay of Taholu was a dim and wavering blue before his eyes, the picture of Lavia Laia so filled his mind. His blood was warm and a galloping rhythm passed through his nerves. Five quiet minutes with Penelope Campbell was what he needed, more than the blue picture of Taholu bay with the clipper lying beside her clean image in the water.

But women should not be in his thoughts at a time like this. He remained stunned by the suddenness with which Tenby had snatched the victory from his hands. All of Taholu he had held in his hands; now he had nothing to rely on but one rifle and fat old Angus Campbell.

He walked on through the garden where Penelope kept the rocks adrip with colors, flowers that were all nameless to Falloner, and presently he was aware that spearmen were standing before and behind him among the trees. He left his thoughts with a start and looked curiously around. These were his own men whom he had selected to train as riflemen from among the choice youth

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of the tribe. He could not receive harm from them or the spears that they now carried. There was Sahi, too, leaning with downward head against a palm tree. The prince said in a lifeless voice:

"Imai Deapa, this day is the mother of all sadness for me. The spear of the king has commanded me to take you and bring you to King Kopana. Will you come?"

"Go to Kopana?" said Falloner. "Doesn't that mean going to Tenby—putting my head under a club?"

With amazement he saw that the spearmen, though their faces remained sorrowfully downcast, were closing about him in thick ranks.

CHAPTER XXIX.

THE KNIFE.

INSIDE the fort, by the forced labor of a crowd of Taholans, Tenby had created a sort of house for the king with a number of poles fixed in the ground, crosspieces stretched above and a thin thatch for a roof. On three sides this habitation was walled in; on the fourth side it was open toward the fires, whose smoke blew steadily away in the soft trade wind. In the center of this enclosure sat King Kopana attended by four of his wives.

Nito was there, dandified in another French uniform all aflash with gold lace and ornaments. Nito kept entirely with Tenby. Wretched Prince Sahi lay on the floor face down, crushed by the deed which he had been compelled to do. Falloner, sitting beside him, vainly patted his shoulder. No reassurance would touch or comfort the heart of Sahi. He had betrayed his friend, and though the betrayal had been forced, the heart of Sahi was broken.

In the South Seas sorrow kills like a disease, and it kills quickly. That was known by Lavia Laia, who was at that moment trying to get from the wizard a charm that would heal Sahi's wounded soul.

Tenby's men bivouacked in the open air outside the tent, keeping watches exactly as though they were on the ship and sounding a ship's bell every half hour. Some manned the gate; a few walked the parapets; there was always one man by each of the little cannon. At this fort Tenby had forty men and Jimmy Birch to lead them. Twenty more remained on the ship which in the night was a vague shadow seen through the gate of the fort, a shadow with one red and one green eye. With that small group of armed sailors, and King Kopana as the charmed figure, the captain was able to subdue all the strength of Taholu.

It was not only subdued, but it was his forever. In so many words he said this to Angus Campbell, who came up the hill to make whatever bargain he could. Penelope Campbell came with her father, and Campbell's big, panting voice could be heard all through the fort.

"Captain Tenby, I can't say that either of us is glad to see the other, but I've been hoping that we can keep our thoughts to ourselves and talk business."

"Of course we can," said Tenby. "But if you've come here for Falloner, talking will be no good."

"Tenby, I have half a shipload of goods in the warehouse. I'll assign the entire lot to you."

"What's Falloner to you?" asked the captain curiously. "And what right have you to offer the goods of your trading company? What would old Farquhar say to it?"

"I have an account with the company that will stand this strain, I think. As for what Falloner is to me—that's my own business. If you set him free I'll give you my word, and my daughter's word, that we'll not be evidence against you for your procedure down here in any civilized court."

"I tell you frankly," said the captain, "that if I gave up Falloner, I would be giving up my luck. I don't like to be brutal about this, but I feel that I'm taking a tremendous chance in letting him stay alive until tomorrow; but I need to have him present at a certain ceremony."

"He's to die tomorrow, then?" asked the trader.

"My dear fellow," said Tenby, "all that

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is in the hands of the King of Taholu."

"And the King of Taholu is in your hands!" exclaimed Campbell. "Are you going to murder Falloner for playing an honest man's part?"

"Honest men can make a great deal of trouble," said Tenby. "If it had not been for Falloner, Taholu would have passed without the least bloodshed into the protecting hands of the French. As it is, the entire island is in a turmoil and men have died by scores, died like flies, Campbell, because of the honesty of this man you want me to give up. No, Campbell! He must be kept here until island justice has claimed him. Damn it, I hate to talk in this vein, but you force me to it. Falloner must die as he has caused other men to die."

The head of Penelope had fallen back against her father's shoulder and she had grown limp. Tenby caught her firmly by the arm and supported her with Campbell's help; she began to recover at once. Tenby was greatly moved.

"What courage!" he said. "The girl loves him, but she stands here in silence while you and I argue—you and I, to whom he is no more than a cloud-shadow on the ground. To her he's the pulse, the warmth of life. Yet not a single appeal passes her lips. How unhappy I am! I would like to bring out Falloner and give him to this girl—how lovely she is!—and tell her to take him and be happy forever. I would like to, I swear to heaven, but a duty to myself and to my purpose prevents me."

Campbell, turning silently away, his arm around the girl, passed slowly and silently down the hill.

LOOKING after them, Tenby began to shake his head. To Jimmy Birch, who had just come up, he said:

"Life's a sad business, Jimmy. My God, how I pity those two, the kind, brave, honest old Scotchman and that noble girl. Noble, Jimmy."

"Have a drink," said Birch, taking out a flask of brandy.

Tenby uncorked and raised the flask. "I drink to you, Penelope. May you forget poor Falloner! May he pass out of your mind like a dream. May you find perfect happiness!"

He took a long pull.

"What a lingo you pack around with you, chief!" chuckled the mate. "Hearing you, a guy would think you were sorry about Falloner."

"I am," said the captain. "A man in a million. Nothing less. But the girl—she wrings my heart. . . . Now what about King Kopana? How do those hours of fasting agree with him?"

"Kopana is sitting up there like one of those damn Buddhas, kind of a pale jade color and all shined up with sweat. By the look of him, you can't tell what's going on inside his head, except for the sweat. He won't hold out long. I've heard that a mole will starve to death in twelve hours; and Kopana's so used to feeding his face every hour or two that maybe he will too. Before morning you'll have him ready to give the spear to Nito, and the whole tribe looking on."

"Poor Kopana!" said the captain. "Old and fat, but a man just the same. It's a pity, Jimmy, that rascals like you and me should come into a Garden of Eden like this with the serpent beside us. 'But winged ambition, like a soaring hawk, climbs heaven to gain a wider view of earth.' I'll take a look at him. It's six hours since I've let him eat anything, and that's the longest fast he's ever known, poor devil."

Captain Tenby went back inside the fort and passed into the fire-lit dimness of the king's new house. Just as the first mate had reported, huge King Kopana sat oozing sweat, while his four troubled wives clustered around him, one wiping his fat forehead, another plying a fan, a third tending the fires about which the pots for the cookery were steaming and filling the air with tempting odors. That was Tenby's way of making hunger a sharper sword before the throat of the king.

The captain went past the immobile face of huge Kopana and paused near Falloner.

"How are you, David?" he asked.

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Falloner, his back lolling comfortably against one of the big central posts that held up the roof, looked over the captain with perfect calm. His hatred of Tenby was too great, too well rounded for any show of passion.

"I'm well enough, Tenby," he said. "The ropes have a good hold on my wrists and ankles. Want to see them?"

"I can see them well enough," said Tenby, smiling. "If I came closer, you might find a way to get those big hands of yours on my throat, and once they were in they'd hold on like the jaws of a bulldog. In your own death, David, you might make an end of me—like Samson. . . . Time for me to snatch a bit of sleep. I hope you won't lie awake remembering that Fortune is such a fickle wench. Good night."

The captain passed on and big-shouldered Jimmy Birch was following when he saw, suddenly exposed in the hands of the prisoner, a pale gleam of light as though a fresh coal from the fire had been dropped into the palm of Falloner. Birch halted, stared, and the opening hands of Falloner showed him the gleam again. This time he could make it out more clearly. It was a pearl of great size, a pearl of wonderful luster and perfect roundness.

He walked on, but with uncertain step.

Captain Tenby, finishing his rounds of the fort, lay down and wrapped himself in a blanket with a book under his head for a pillow.

His snoring joined that of his sleeping garrison; the watch went ceaselessly up and down the parapets or lingered by the gate by the two cannon.

PARTLY by starlight Falloner could make out this scene. Within the hut he saw by the wavering light of the fire where the wives of Kopana crouched over their useless cookery. He watched the jade-pale body of the silent king, dimly polished with sweat, and guessed at the torments of hunger which poor Kopana was enduring.

This was the last night of his life. He felt that he ought to use the time and order his mind so that he could face death more easily the next day. But all he could think of was Tenby, Tenby, the smooth-voiced, smiling, quoting hypocrite.

To use the pearl—that had occurred to him when Jimmy Birch went by. Not for the price of ten thousand pearls would Tenby spare his life, but Birch might be a different matter. Or would the first mate simply tell the captain that their prisoner had in his hands a jewel of great price?

Jimmy Birch came by. In front of the king's open-faced house there were four guards. Birch, with a few low-voiced commands, moved them away and set them to pacing the parapet, where Falloner could see their striding legs as high as the knees. Birch entered the dimness of the house of Kopana and went straight to Falloner.

"Lemme see!" he commanded.

Falloner opened his hands, but not wide enough to permit the first mate to snatch the jewel. The firelight was dim, but there was enough of it to make the pearl glow like a rolling eyeball.

Jimmy Birch said: "Oh, my God!"

Something slipped out of his hand and dropped to the ground between the knees of Falloner.

"I'm changing the watch in five minutes, and moving the boys away from the gate."

"All right," said Falloner, and opened his hands wide.

The pearl disappeared from them, and Jimmy Birch went away. It seemed to Falloner that shudders of joy were running through those enormous shoulders.

He picked up the knife which the first mate had let fall. The tough fibres of the rope resisted the edge; the knife made little squeaking sounds as it cut through the strands. At last Falloner was free of foot, free of hand and with a knife for a weapon.

He touched Sahi. The boy lay inert, loose of flesh, like a stunned creature.

"Sahi!" whispered Falloner.

The head of Sahi jerked up. He stared wildly at his friend.

"My feet and hands are free; I have a knife; in five minutes I start for the gate of the fort. Will you come with me?"

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"Into a shark's mouth and out again, brother!" said Sahi. He got to his knees; the firelight trembled on the gold of his skin.

And then, out of the distance, Falloner heard the distinct commands of the first mate calling the old watch from the gate. Falloner rose. He saw the fat king turn his head a little to watch, but Kopana made no sound. His lips were parted, but that was because he was breathing hard; already he was in an agony of hunger.

Sahi, taking the roll of white tapa cloth away from his own body, wrapped it quietly about Falloner. Then they rose together and started without haste towards the open face of the house.

The floor was adrift with shadows that lifted and fell regularly, for the fire was freshening and fading like something that breathed.

A figure leaped up in a far corner, with a glitter of metal on the body, and then the ringing voice of Nito was calling out:

"Who is there? Sahi, is that you? Who is that with you?"

Immediately the yell of Sahi tore the air.

"Imai Deapa! Imai Deapa! He is leaving us—he is escaping!"

The sailors knew the name of Kopana; they also knew the native name for Falloner, and the sound of it screeched out at this time of the night would bring them to their feet, guns in hand.

Falloner was already running at full speed, and the gleam of Sahi was there before him, always half a step ahead as though ready to catch the first bullets in his own body.

They swerved out of the house of the king. Before them the gate opened in the wall of the little fort a wedge filled with stars. Half a dozen men were near the gate, their rifles glimmering in their hands, but Jimmy Birch had fulfilled his promise; the gate itself was empty.

A lion's roar began thundering behind them. That was the voice of Tenby booming as though a storm at sea, so that men on the royal yard high above could hear every syllable. Now he was roaring a promise of wealth to the men who stopped the fugitive.

Falloner raced through the open gateway as if through the door of heaven. Hope had put wings in his heels. He swerved and dodged like a snipe flying upwind. For the rifles had begun. The wasp sounds of the bullets tore past his ears. He saw natives boiling out of the huts before him. A sudden cry rang up and down the street: "Imai Deapa! Imai Deapa!" and then shouting and laughter.

He was deep in the friendly crowd which opened before him; he was far away among the huts.

CHAPTER XXX.

THE KING EATS.

THOUGH the whole population would gladly have streamed out of Taholu with Falloner and Prince Sahi, he took with him only his trained men and went down the beach to a place where another hill rose, quite clear of jungle. There Penelope Campbell and her father came to be free from the long arm of Captain Tenby. There was Lavia Laia dancing in the moonlight; and all up and down the beach was a sound of laughter and of singing.

But Falloner was sitting with old Matuko and young Kalou, in close conference.

"Can you find again the place where you caught the oyster with the big white pebble inside it?" he asked Matuko.

"Aye—of course," said Matuko.

"Will you serve me, Matuko?"

Matuko laughed and made a gesture with both hands.

"Kopana loves you so much that if I serve you, I am serving him," said Matuko.

"That's a kind thing to say," answered Falloner. "Do you think that all the fishing clan, all of you, would work for me?"

"They would," said Sahi. "Hai, Imai Deapa! I would call them and lead them. Where shall they go?"

"Out to the place where Kalou found that oyster with the white pebble inside. Because of that little stone, you and I are

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sitting here free. Another time I'll tell you why. Look, Matuko! There is a great, round, bright moon. Could you dive by that light and see the bottom of the sea where you found the oyster today?"

"If there is not enough light to see by, we could see the bottom with the feel of our hands," said Matuko. "Shall we go now?"

"Yes, quickly. Some of you to dive and bring up the oysters, and others to open them, looking always for the little white pebbles. No matter how small they are, I shall be glad to have them. All the fishing clan, because they will be the best. And as many of the young men who are the best swimmers to go along. Quickly, Matuko, and before sunrise come back to me here as fast as the wind will blow or the paddles drive you, and bring me all the pebbles."

NOT the few boats of the fishing clan, but two score canoes put off from the beach of Taholu, silently, and urged their swift craft across the bay with their swaying shadows floating over the side.

"How many oysters have to be opened before a pearl is apt to be found?" Falloner asked Campbell.

The old trader puffed his pipe and spoke from the side of his mouth.

"One in a thousand," he answered.

Falloner groaned. "Stop that dancing, Lavia Laia," he said. "I can't think when you're dancing like that."

She stopped. The young men of Taholu began to laugh. Lavia Laia came to Penelope and sat down beside her.

"Is he angry?" she asked Penelope, panting after that dance of triumph.

"No, but he wants to think very hard," said the white girl.

"Why does he always have to think?" asked Lavia Laia. "Thought in a man's face is like rain in the sky; and Imai Deapa is always dark. It makes me a little weary. I think I shall sleep, now. But wake me if he stands up."

She put her head in the lap of Penelope, stretched, yawned, and was instantly asleep.

Falloner said: "There are two hundred men in those boats; half of them will be diving before long. They ought to bring up a quantity of the shells even in an hour's work."

"Aye," said Campbell, "and if it's an untouched oyster bed and a big one, they might find as many as a pearl to every shell. Why do you want them?"

"I have a plan," said Falloner. "It's too strange to be likely but it's the only hope I can find."

A gun spoke from the deck of the Inverarry; the fleet of agile canoes scattered. There was no more firing and the canoes disappeared out the mouth of Taholu harbor. Afterwards a boat put off from the beach manned by half a dozen sailors. Their long sweeps moved with a rhythmic gleaming until the boat was lost in the shadow under the side of the clipper; the dim figures of the men could be seen climbing on board.

A moment later a runner came breathless to make a report. It was Jimmy Birch who had been out to the ship. In the fort, all was commotion. A squad of the white men had gone down to the house of Campbell and searched it. They had been heard breaking things; they came out with their arms filled with plunder and went back to the fort.

Campbell, as he listened, merely said:

"That's robbery, almost piracy. Wayne and Farquhar might interest the United States Government enough to have a gunboat sent to call at this port. It may be the entering wedge, David."

"You'll be starved and done for long before a gunboat could get down here," answered Falloner. "Tonight or tomorrow night we have to strike at Tenby or else the game is his."

WORSE news came a moment later. The natives listening to the sounds inside the fort had heard the wives of Kopana clapping their hands. That meant that he had just finished eating; and that, of course, was the sign he had surrendered to Captain Tenby.

Falloner bowed his head into his hands.

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In the morning bright and early, all the people of Taholu would be gathered to see their king give the sacred spear and the royalty with which it was endowed into the hands of Nito. And after that, in five brief minutes the foolish lad would have conveyed the rights to the island to the French government. Taholu would be a protectorate as clearly dependent upon Paris as Tahiti itself.

Campbell asked, "Why break your heart about a parcel of blackbirds? We'll manage to shift for ourselves until the Wayne and Farquhar boat comes; and then even Nito and the French can't prevent us from taking ship and sailing home. Home is a word that has a good, meaty sound to me just now."

"Home?" echoed Falloner. "And leave Tenby here as the real king of the place? Home? I'll stay here until—"

"Hush!" said Penelope. "If you make a vow, you'll be foolish enough to try to keep it."

He was silent, but they could see the setting of his big jaw. Compared with the sleek, regular features of the Taholans, he looked far more the primitive savage.

He took off the bloodstained bandage from his head and rewound it with fresh cloth. Half a dozen of the young men suddenly were fighting and wrestling to gain possession of the stained cloth which he had thrown away until the clear, imperious voice of Lavia Laia stopped them. She stepped among them and took possession of the worthless rag. To Falloner she said, severely:

"Don't you know that if even a thread of this cloth with your blood on it came into the hands of a wizard, he could have command of your soul? He could burn up your body or make it dry and wither away. I shall keep it. Now you lie down and rest. No one can keep thinking when he lies on his back. And so your poor forehead will have a rest. Shall I dance for you?"

"No," said Falloner.

He turned his head towards Penelope, half-ashamed, but she smiled and nodded to him. Either she cared nothing about him, or else there was no touch of jealousy in her nature; or perhaps it was the old affection that tied her to Lavia Laia, as though to more than a sister.

"Shall I sing for you?" went on Lavia Laia.

"No," said Falloner.

He stretched himself on his back and drew in a great breath. Above him, the head of a palm tree sprayed out against the moonlit sky like the arching streams of a tall fountain.

"Shall I tell you a story?" asked the girl.

"Yes," said Falloner.

"There was a king long ago," said Lavia Laia, "who never had seen a girl he could love—"

"I think I've heard that story," said Falloner. "Tell me another."

"Once there was a maiden so beautiful that when she went swimming the sun turned the sea to gold and the coral burned with red fire; and one day when she was—"

"Tell me a story about the old wars," said Falloner. "I don't care about girls and boys whether on the dry land or floating in the sea."

"Be still, Imai Deapa," said the girl. "It is rude to interrupt a story. Once there was a maiden so beautiful that when she went swimming the sun turned the sea to gold . . ."

FALLONER did not sleep. When the soft darkness began to come over his mind, the thought of Tenby returned to stab him like a spear. At the end of so many struggles, Tenby had won a perfect and complete victory; there was no weapon against him unless fisherman's luck followed those Taholans who had gone out to dive for pearls.

They came back in a fleet through the mouth of the bay. Ten urgent paddles drove one of the canoes far ahead of the rest, and the slender craft swept in a long curve past the Inverarry to the beach near the hill where Falloner and his men were posted.

It was Kalou, with his bandaged hand and his limping gait, who ran up the hill

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through the darkness crying, " Imai Deapa! Imai Deapa!"

He carried with him a small twist of tapa cloth which he undid and poured into the hands of Falloner a small shower that gleamed in the moonlight.

It seemed impossible that two hundred men could have worked so long for such a small reward, but this was all they had accomplished—a little mound that was dwarfed by the size of Falloner's hands. Some of the pearls were very small, others were misshapen; it was only by degrees that he saw, here and there in the heap, some big moonlit globes almost as large as that first pearl which Kalou had secured at the cost of so much danger and so much pain.

He forgot the rest. The big ones he picked out, half a dozen of them that lent beauty to one another. Then he stood up and went down to the beach.

CHAPTER XXXI.

GUNS ON DECK.

ABOARD the Inverarry the watch saw a mere slip of an eight-foot canoe come towards them, followed by a powerful ten-paddle war canoe. Out of the smaller boat a strong voice hailed the clipper.

" Ahoy! Jimmy Birch!"

The first mate was wakened from sound sleep with the word: " That fellow Falloner is out there hailing the ship. We've got a bow-gun loaded with grape trained on him. Say the word and we'll blow him to hell in small bits."

" Wait a minute," answered the mate, and clambered hastily to the deck, half-dressed.

" Ahoy, the canoe!" thundered Jimmy Birch.

" Will you come out here and talk to me, Jimmy?" demanded Falloner.

" What's the trick you got up your long sleeve, Falloner?" asked the mate.

" Six tricks like one you saw tonight," said Falloner.

" Six tricks like— Hold on, Falloner! I'll come off to you in the skiff."

A moment later Falloner saw the little boat lowered. The bow guns were both manned in the moonlight and cleared for action, plainly to cover the skiff and its occupant in case the war canoe in the background should try to dash up and seize Birch; but the mate himself began to row out with powerful strokes of the oars. He halted his small craft at a short distance, gave a last oar stroke so that it turned and floated stern on towards Falloner, and then putting down the oars, Jimmy Birch picked up a sawed-off shotgun which he rested across his knees.

" We can talk now, Falloner," he said. " Six, did you say? Six of the same?"

" Smaller, but big enough to fill your eye, Jimmy. Will you take a look at one of 'em?"

He tossed it through the moonlight, a gleaming streak which the mate caught, clapping his hands loudly as he snatched it out of the air.

" Hai!" cried Birch. " Don't go throwing things like this around! My God, here's a pearl that'd make any woman twenty years younger. *Five* more, did you say? Where did you fetch 'em?"

" I'm not fool enough to tell you where they were fished up, or whether they were got today or a hundred years ago. Here's the point: Tenby and his gang are on shore. You have the Inverarry and twenty thugs with you. Take three of these pearls to put in your pockets; take three more to show to your crew. When they've seen 'em, do you think they'll want to stay here and split the profits with Tenby? Or do you think they'll be willing to hoist sail and blow down the trades to the first port?"

" And leave Tenby here in the lurch? Leave him loose here?" asked the mate.

" He won't be loose very long. I'll see to that with some of my friends," said Falloner.

" I'll do it!" exclaimed Jimmy Birch. " He's been the master and I've been the dog too long. Let him stick here in Taholu and be damned! Hand over the pearls and

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I'll clear the Inverarry out of Taholu Bay with the first morning light!"

"Good!" said Falloner. "You have some things in the hold of the Inverarry that we could use here in Taholu."

"What things?" asked the first mate.

"Rifles," said Falloner. "You have them by cases and cases. I'll accept two hundred good rifles and plenty of ammunition. The big canoe here can be loaded with them. Let the stuff be put into the longboat and rowed out here."

Jimmy Birch paused to consider, and as he considered he cursed softly and steadily. He concluded:

"Tenby already thinks there's something wrong. What if he spots this traffic going on and comes swarming out here from the town?"

"We'll do the business on the far side of the Inverarry. She'll be the screen for us."

"And suppose that I hand over the guns —what's my surety that you'll give me the pearls?" asked the mate.

"My word and my honor," said Falloner.

"Aye," muttered Jimmy Birch. "I suppose you've got a word of honor. Most that ship on the Inverarry leave such stuff behind them on the shore. I've given my word, here and there, but mostly I've forgotten to sandwich the honor along with it."

HE began to laugh, and still laughing he leaned on the oars so hard that the nose of the skiff lifted and she skimmed over the water leaving a widening triangle of shadow. The affair was done very quickly. Off the decks of the Inverarry, Falloner could hear a muttering of voices in dispute and then a muffled shout told him that the decision had been reached.

All became activity. The sight of the single pearl in the hand of Jimmy Birch had been enough to set the entire crew on fire. Cases were trundled up on the deck. They bumped with a hollow sound. They were opened. With a dull glimmering, a long line of rifles passed over the side into the longboat. At least a thousand stand of small arms had been put on board the Inverarry by the French at Tahiti, and there was no doubt that the clipper could afford to give away this much of the armament.

Ammunition boxes followed rapidly. Then the longboat put off with six men at the sweeps and Jimmy Birch seated in the stern-sheets. The call of Falloner brought in the war canoe. He himself looked on curiously, and drifted his small craft to the stern of the longboat. There he slipped into the hand of Jimmy Birch first two naked pearls, then three more in a little twist of cloth, which the mate slid instantly into a pocket.

He muttered: "The pearls are in that twist, are they? You wouldn't lie to me, Falloner? No, you wouldn't lie. One day we'll meet in a bar, somewhere between London and Singapore, and then we'll down a long one together. . . . But where do you come out in this? Just a chance to get your teeth into the nape of Tenby's neck? Think of the black hell that will boil up in the old man when he sees the Inverarry sliding away down the harbor with all sails set and the bow wave shining? Ha, ha! I'd like to see his face!"

He stood up and held between one thumb and forefinger three little globules of moon-like radiance.

"Look, lads!" he cried.

They looked, and they shouted. It caught Falloner with a sudden wonder when he saw that crew of big men wave their arms and throw back their heads with drunken laughter on account of a few little gleaming bits of oyster secretion. For the sake of three pearls, they were willing to take their hands from the destiny of Taholu. But Falloner, looking back through the moonlight towards the forested slopes of the island and the smoking tops of the two great volcanoes, felt that he was committed to a long life of action here. This was his new country, his home.

The longboat rowed back toward the Inverarry and the big war canoe slid away toward the beach, heavily burdened with munitions of war. Falloner now had twice as many rifles as he had men to use them.

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Once more he would be a force to reckon with in the island of Taholu.

Now the prow of the canoe touched the slushy sand; a score of his waiting Taholans plunged into the water and ran the craft up on the dry sands.

IT seemed to Captain Tenby that the game was now entirely in his own hands. The fat king would pass the sacred spear and its power to Nito; and Nito in due time would give both the spear and a scrap of signed paper to Tenby. So the transfer of Taholu would be complete and the Tricolor could be hoisted on the only flagstaff in the town, that pole above the house of Angus Campbell from which the American flag had been torn down by Tenby's angry mob the day before.

The time for the ceremony had come. Messengers that ran through Taholu had summoned the people, and from the oldest inhabitant to the smallest child in arms the tribesmen had gathered with the rising of the sun and packed themselves in a great, dense semicircle on the slope of the hill that rose just under the townward gate of Falloner's fort. In front of that gate Tenby's forty men were lined up with a military precision—a choice lot which never could have been assembled except in the South Seas.

Not ten of these fellows were of the original crew of the Inverarry. The rest were the recruits picked up at Tahiti, renegade Frenchmen, Portuguese, American and English beachcombers, Spaniards, a pair of Sicilians.

They had two virtues. All of them knew how to shoot straight and all of them were ready to fight like wild cats. Because of those virtues, Tenby looked on them with an eye of pride.

He was about to make history before he descended to the shore and rowed out to the Inverarry carrying with him the priceless little document which made of Taholu a French possession.

One of his lieutenants said at his ear: "There are three or four lookouts in the tops of those palms, yonder. They're keepin' an eye on things in the town. Shall we shoot those blackbirds off their perch?"

"They're Falloner's lookouts," said Tenby. "That's all poor Falloner can do, now. He can sit on a limb and look—and be damned. He has empty hands now, son. And as for seeing what happens in Taholu, let him look till his eyes ache. . . . Now bring out Kopana!"

Kopana was brought, supported by a man on either side and carrying in his hand the old brown-headed spear of office. Young Nito skulked behind the figure of his father, his bright eyes narrowing as they glanced from side to side at the big, close-packed audience.

Kopana made a stand, leaning on the spear. His hairless head, the rolling ocean of his fat, glistened in the slant light of the morning sun, for by day and night his flesh was oiled by a continual perspiration.

His great voice boomed like the note of a war-drum through the town.

TENBY grew tense with happy expectation. Glancing down the bay, he was rather surprised to see the Inverarry making sail. There had been no rain, and there was no apparent reason why the canvas should be dried. However, Jimmy Birch was a man who never did foolish things. He had some good reason of his own. Perhaps the first mate had discovered some justifiable cause of changing the anchorage of the clipper to another spot close at hand; for now—very small with distance—Tenby could hear the dull groan of the windlass as half the crew of the ship worked to up the anchor. But the other half, according to plan, had manned the stern chasers and the mid-ships pivot gun and commanded the town with these weapons.

Tenby heard the speech of the king begin and forgot all other things.

"My children," said Kopana, "the white men have come. Where the white men come, they stay. We know what happened in Tahiti; we know the story of the Tongans; and now the same story will be told of the Taholans. I have been your king; you have been my children; and I do not

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wish to be only a play-king, which is what the white men make of us. From this day forward, I shall rule you no longer. I intend to give my spear to the son who wants it. He is here. His name is Nito. Do I hear you shout for him?"

Young Nito, at the advice of Tenby, had not put on the French uniform for this special occasion. On the contrary, he was dressed merely as a chief, but his high-feathered headdress was a masterpiece fully five feet high, and the whale-teeth necklaces covered his breast almost like scales of heavy armor. In one hand he held a long, paddle-bladed spear; in the other hand was a war-club that looked too massive for his slender arms.

A more handsome lad never stood on the hill of Taholu, but now as the king his father asked applause for him, there was not a sound of response.

Tenby frowned. The Taholans, man, woman, and child, as though they had taken an oath of silence, looked with expressionless eyes on the heir to the throne.

King Kopana said: "I seem to hear an answer from you. And now I am going to give the sacred spear from my heart into the heart of Nito. Stand before me, Nito!"

The boy turned his back on the audience and faced the huge king, who lifted the spear toward the sky. The fat of his arm hung down like loose folds of cloth.

"Nito," said the great voice of Kopana, "you are my blood, and mine is the blood of the spear. Is there any man to say no to this?"

A faint groan came from the audience, but no one spoke a distinct word. With fascinated, horrified eyes the Taholans watched the ceremony which would make the traitor their master so long as he lived.

"Nito, do you take this spear for the service of the gods and of your people?"

"I do take it," said Nito, "for the service of the gods—and—of my people."

The lie seemed to make his tongue a trifle heavy, and again there was that faint, murmuring groan from the listeners.

Even the soldiers of Tenby understood enough to stir uneasily, and a few looked back towards the parapet of the earthen fort as though they would have felt happier and safer inside that rampart.

"As I bore the spear, will you bear it?" asked the king.

"As you bore it, I shall bear it," said Nito.

"Will you take the spear as I give it?"

"I shall take it as you give it," said Nito.

"Then, from my heart—to your heart!" cried the king in a terrible voice, and drove the spearhead straight through the breast of his son, so that the point thrust out a foot behind the back.

THERE was only a whispering sound. Not the smallest child cried out, but there was a rustling as all the squatting figures of the audience arose.

Nito, falling prone on his back, lay with his arms stretched out, looking forever at the sky. King Kopana remained with his huge arm outstretched as though he still were guiding the stroke.

"The spear has gone from me," he said, "and now let the strongest hand take it!"

Two or three of the sailors caught Kopana on either side.

"Easy with him," said Tenby. "This is a set-back, my lads. It's not the end of the game. I'll have the hide flayed off the back of the greasy swine for this! I've spent a whole cask of brandy on drunken Nito—and all that good liquor is wasted! Here—pick up the prince—damn him! Pick him up. Why don't the Taholans do something?"

The islanders had remained as silent as stone. It was from inside the fort that a voice yelled out, suddenly: "Captain Tenby — Tenby — they've come — for God's sake—!"

The voice rushed up inside the parapet and burst upon their ears as the sailor reached the top of the earthen wall. It was a Portuguese half-breed from Africa, a fellow who wore big ear-rings that touched his shoulders; his usual color was mere sallow; now it was green.

"Help!" he shouted. "Falloner—"

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A single rifle spoke. The Portuguese leaped into the air, bending back as though he were trying to make his head and heels meet in a sort of fancy dive; and Tenby heard, across the interior of the fort, the singular soft drumming noise that is made by many bare feet running over the ground. And then a universal cry went up inside the fort, and from the compact masses of the Taholans in front of it: "Imai Deapa! Imai Deapa!" That shout tore the heavens apart, for Tenby, and filled his brain with a leaping fire.

CHAPTER XXXII.

TENBY'S END.

CAPTAIN TENBY turned into the fight after a single second of amazement and despair. He let out the full thunder of his voice, shouting: "Now, lads! Now, hearts! Up and at them! A few blackbirds to shoot down. You on the left face the gang in front—start shooting if a single spear is raised. The rest of you into the fort and do some pig-shooting. There aren't three rifles among the lot of them! After me, boys!"

The captain himself, as he sprang forward to lead the charge through the gate, did not carry a rifle. He had his book clasped under his left arm. In his right hand was a Colt's revolver which was, after all, his favorite weapon. And the sight of their captain starting so cheerfully for the fight, the ringing, hearty thunder of his voice, poured courage back into the hearts of that startled, mongrel outfit. A half dozen of them being nearer to the gate than the captain actually pressed through it ahead of him.

They fell where they stood. A great rifle volley had struck them. They dropped as though an invisible wall had been flung down to smash them. Some were dead, and some still writhing. And even the courage of Captain Tenby was daunted by the miracle of that rifle volley. And the continual shouting of "Imai Deapa" maddened and confused his brain as it confused the brains of the rest of his men. Recoiling from that deadly gateway, they fell into a confused huddle.

The villagers had been robbed of most of their spears and war-clubs long before, but now every hand was raised with a weapon of some sort. Knives, a scattering of a surprising number of spears and fish-lances, a number of improvised clubs, a still greater number of heavy stones were poised; a flood of golden hundreds of Taholans was ready to pour at the white men on the first word of command. But that command did not come from King Kopana. He had finished his kingship with his speech; and now he sat cross-legged at the side of his dead son.

That uproar inside the fort, like a swift wave, rushed up the inside of the embankment and now broke in a fury just above the heads of the white men—scores upon scores of young Taholans, and in the hands of every man a fine new repeating rifle. Down the barrels of those guns they looked at the confused group of Tenby's men.

But to the captain that overwhelming blow was not the worst. Far more to him was the apparition of big David Falloner striding through the gate with a red-stained rag twisted like a turban about his head and a pair of revolvers in his hands; and beside him ran the prince whom the people loved. There was Sahi, and behind Sahi a score of the best were following.

It was the end, and Tenby knew it. He merely yelled out: "Aim your shots! Give 'em something to remember you by, my boys!" Setting a good example, he dropped to one knee, still with his book automatically clasped under his left arm, and levelled his revolver.

Falloner was his target.

BUT Falloner paid no heed to him. He walked up and down with his armed hands raised above his head, shouting for silence, and silence began to spread. The Taholans were dancing and writhing with eagerness to run into the fight, but the voice of their king gave no order, Sahi said nothing, and there was only the voice of the Long Hand ordering quiet. So they held themselves back, though a single surge for-

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ward would be enough to sweep them across this helpless little island of white men.

There was suddenly such stillness that the voice of Angus Campbell sounded very loud from the parapet.

"Say the word, David. I can sluice half of them straight to hell with this gun."

For the Scotchman had taken possession of the nearest of the little cannon on the wall and had trained it down on the group of sailors.

They knew what that meant. With their own hands they had crammed the cannon with grape almost to the mouth. So, wavering, thoroughly unnerved, they jammed closer together until they rendered themselves helpless by their own crowding.

They heard Falloner saying: "Don't fire, there, Angus! Tenby, tell your men to put down their guns."

"The blackbirds will murder us the moment we ground arms," said the captain.

"Give them the order," said Falloner, angrily. "It isn't their guns that is saving them; there's nothing under God's heaven that will prevent a massacre except my word between their knives and your throats."

"Perhaps you're right," said the captain, looking about him with a wonderful calmness. "And I can trust you, David? There'll be no bloodshed afterwards?"

"None that I can stop," said Falloner.

"Don't say that!" shouted Campbell. "That scoundrel Tenby—" Wrath choked him.

But Tenby went on: "I take you at your word. And thank God that your word is better than steel. My lads, the game's up. We have lost. Put down your guns. Unbuckle your cutlasses."

"Only the rifles and the revolvers," said Falloner. "Keep the other tools. If you have nothing at all in hand, the Taholans may be tempted too much. Down with the guns, and step away from them."

THE guns went down, and a yell screamed tingling up against the sky from the throats of the natives. They knew their victory by that significant gesture.

"And how did it happen, David?" asked Tenby, in his gentlest voice.

"Look!" said Falloner, and pointed towards the bay.

For there sailed the Inverarry towards the mouth of the harbor under a full press of canvas, her wake widening behind her, the kindly trade-wind leaning her a little to the side. Tenby's men, when they saw that picture, broke out into a cry of despair—but it was on a strangely low note. They were already holding their lives by a most precarious tenure.

"A few pearls," said Falloner, "were too much for Jimmy Birch and his men. He got them cheap, too. Only two hundred rifles and ammunition. That's the story."

"And yet it doesn't seem possible," said Tenby; "actually it doesn't, David. I look around me at the beauty of Taholu, and can't believe that all my little plans have been scattered to bits. I built a little too slightly, I fear. By the way, what do you intend doing with us, David?"

Falloner stared at the man and waited for profound disgust and hatred to well up in him, but the expected emotion would not come. He began to smile, a little grimly.

"Ah, I understand," said Tenby. "Now that the fight's over, and the long battle has ended so completely in your favor, you wonder what you'll find to fill your hands from now forward. Isn't that it?"

"I'll fill them without you, Tenby," said Falloner. "There's a fair wind blowing now, and there's a big outrigger down on the beach that I think I can get for you. March your men down there. I'll have provisions and some fishing tackle and a few guns put into it. And so you can sail before the day's an hour older."

"Aye, but sail where? And a fair wind for what?" asked Tenby.

"For Tahiti," said Falloner. "The French will have reasons to be glad to see you."

"Reasons to hang me by the neck from a yardarm!" cried Tenby. But, a moment later he shrugged his shoulders and chuckled. "That chance is a good many

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hundred miles away," he said. "There will be time to think of other things to do. Shall we start on for the beach?"

THE big outrigger was readily granted as a means of getting rid of the Tenby plague. It was heaped by hundreds of hands with a plentiful supply of provisions and the whole population of Taholu ringed the beach around or floated in scores of canoes waiting for the strangers to sail.

The last word Tenby said to Falloner was: "I won't find the voyage long. There'll never be an empty moment of thought in the rest of the years of my life. Because when I'm dull, I can day-dream about what I'll do when once I fill my hands with the carcass of Jimmy Birch. He was the weak link in my chain. That was where my plans burst asunder. And so, *adios*, David. Even the wicked have consolations in their failures; because they see that good still triumphs in the world. Well, well, I'm afraid that I'm a great hypocrite, David, but by God, when I think what you and I could do in the South Seas—with Tenby for weight in the head of the ax and Falloner for the cutting edge—what a swath we would cut—Well, *á Dios*."

He stood in the stern of the boat, giving commands, and the silent crew were all active, except for the wounded men who had been carried down from where they lay in the gate of the fort. Whether on the Inverarry, on shore, or in a home-made canoe, the captain remained the true commander. Already he had the book from under his arm and his finger wedged in the place where he would resume his reading, but still he waved courteous farewells until his figure was obscure, and the increasing wind skipped the outrigger gaily toward the entrance to the bay.

Falloner turned his back on that part of his life and went slowly up the hill toward the fort. Jubilation filled the town except in the long house of the king. Falloner, listening to the wailing of the women and hearing a deeper voice from a man, stopped in the door of the house. A shaft of sunlight, streaming in through the torn place in the thatch where a cannonball from the Inverarry had smashed the roof, happened to be striking just now directly on the spot where the dead prince lay.

They had put a head-rest under his neck and wreathed his head with flowers. Flowers, also, lay all around the dead Nito, and the sunlight made him shine like an image in polished metal. Sahi and Lavia Laia stood apart, he with a downward head, but the girl swaying back and forth as she uttered the rhythmical lament with the rest of the women. And in the hand of Sahi was the sacred spear to prove that Kopana had endowed him with the rule of the Taholans. So the plan of Tenby had recoiled in every respect and reacted in the unexpected direction.

Kopana himself sat at the side of his dead son with his huge, fat hand on the forehead of Nito. The rest of him was in shadow, so that he seemed to glimmer faintly by the light reflected from the body of the prince. He chanted, slowly, in his deep, booming, gonglike voice, that ancient Taholan lament, whose main image is drawn from the shortness of the tropic twilight and dawn, the sudden opening of the eye of day and its quick closing.

Lavia Laia was suddenly at the side of Falloner, laughing, murmuring: "Ah hai! It is done! They are gone! Are you happy?"

He looked at her with bewilderment.

"I thought you were wailing for Nito," he said.

"Yes," she said, "but now I'm happy for a moment and afterwards I'll be unhappy again."

CHAPTER XXXIII.

THE WREATH.

CAPTAIN ISAAC CUTHBERT brought Wayne and Farquhar's Wanderer into Taholu harbor a month ahead of time, but he was delighted to find that the warehouse of Angus Campbell already was filled with goods. As usual, the

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crew of the Wanderer remained strictly on board while the work of loading the ship was done entirely by natives hired for a few trifling presents.

But this time the whole canoe-population of Taholu was enlisted and in a single day, between dawn and dark, the hold of the Wanderer was jammed, while Angus Campbell sat on the deck and checked off the items as they were carried over the side. Captain Cuthbert was delighted with the rapid progress.

He could not help asking what had happened to the semi-hostile Taholans since he was last there.

"Falloner happened to them," said the Scotchman, smiling. He pointed and said: "That big fellow standing in the canoe and giving orders. The chap with the feathered head-dress is the new king of Taholu—that's Sahi, because fat old Kopana resigned. That big fellow with nothing on his head to keep him from the sun and stripped to the waist. Nothing but the white trousers to pick him out from the natives, and the sun has burned him almost as dark as the rest of 'em. But that's the real king of Taholu. That's Falloner."

"Falloner?" said Cuthbert. "There must be a story behind him."

"Aye, a long story," said Campbell.

"Aye, but I've heard his name, I think. Hello—boatswain!"

"Aye, aye, sir."

"What have I heard you say about a fellow named Falloner? What yarns have I heard you spin about him?"

"That's away back on the cattle range," said the boatswain, "the last trip I made up there, before a damned two-ended mustang piled me and give me a hankering for the sea again. This Falloner was a biggish two-handed kind of a gent that bounced a bullet off the skull of a puncher and thought he'd killed him, and run for his life, and nobody never heard of him since."

"What was the first name of that Falloner?" demanded Campbell, starting up.

"Barney, or something," said the boatswain. "No, David was the name and—"

Campbell was already at the rail of the ship, thundering, and Falloner brought his canoe quickly alongside with a word to his paddlers.

"Dave, listen to this!" cried Campbell. "Here's something to wash your hands clean and take a load off your mind. Listen!"

And Falloner, listening, began to look up, and up, until at last he was laughing with joy. A barrier had been struck down. He no longer was a man without a country; and sweeping the white beach, the blue bay, the towering mountains of Taholu with a glance, it seemed to him a greater and more beautiful place because now he was not limited to it.

IN five minutes the plan was made and affirmed. Falloner would sail back on the Wanderer and carry with him, for the eyes of the Secretary of State of the United States, a certain document that bore the signature of Sahi, King of Taholu, and asking for American protection—a unique protection—"protection from the other countries in the civilized world and the right of trade with white men who should not set foot on Taholan soil without the will of the inhabitants."

There were not many preparations to make. Some of Campbell's cut-down clothes rolled into a carry-all were prepared; and above all there was a small sack of oiled silk which Falloner wore strapped about his body above the heart, and which was filled with selected pearls. Half of the proceeds could go to Taholu and the returns be invested in everything from seed wheat to modern plows and hoes, and a small sawmill, together with other bits of modern machinery. The other half of the profits would be divided equally between Falloner and Angus Campbell.

All of those details were arranged, and the biggest of Sahi's war-canoes waited to carry Imai Deapa out to the ship which would transport him back to America. But Falloner delayed in the house of Campbell, saying very earnestly to Penelope: "Can I bring back the stuff we'd need to start housekeeping for ourselves?"

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"You'd have to bring back a minister to marry us," said Penelope.

"The ship's captain could do that," answered Falloner. "The point is—do you care enough, Penelope?"

She struck him silent with her answer.

"The point is do *you* care enough?"

He could only stammer: "I? Do *I* care enough?"

"I'll marry you," she told him, "as soon as you can hold up your right hand and say: 'There's no other woman in my mind. I've forgotten Lavia Laia!' But *can* you say that now?"

The answer which he started to make stumbled on his tongue.

And Penelope said: "She *is* a heavenly face. And if you're longer on Taholu—very much longer—don't you think you may forget that her skin is not white?"

"The children!" broke out Falloner. "Half-breeds—"

"Two thoroughbreds don't have half-breed children," she said.

"It's always been this way, from the first," said Falloner. "As if you were pleading her cause."

"No, I'm not doing that," answered the girl. "But I love her. And this that you want—this would kill her, David. Grief does kill them, like a fever. I've seen it happen."

"What shall I say?" asked Falloner.

"Say nothing," she answered. "You need to think; and by the time you get to America, the wind will have blown the right thought into your mind."

"But I know now—" said Falloner.

"You think you do. But Lavia Laia is waiting for you outside the door, I know. And when you see her, you may change your mind."

THE moon cast thronging shadows of the trees in the garden of Angus Campbell but the rustling was not all of the wind through the upper branches, for there were crowds of Taholans gathered in the place, and when they saw Falloner come out through the lamplit doorway of the trader's house, a deep, musical murmuring rose from the crowd. The voices of men were in it, and the shrill tingling of children crying out with pleasure as their mothers lifted them shoulder-high. Lavia Laia stepped out with Sahi into a patch of moonlight.

"I'll go ahead," said Campbell. "Get through all the damned foolishness with that girl, and join me on the beach."

But there was no "damned foolishness." Lavia Laia was as gay as though the man she loved were bound no farther off than the other side of the bay for moonlight fishing.

She danced around Falloner all the way to the beach.

"You understand?" said Sahi at the ear of his friend. "She has been to the wizard and given him four fat pigs, and he has put a charm on that wreath of flowers she is wearing. Before you go, she will give it to you, and as long as you keep even the dust of one blossom, you will have to remember her!"

On the beach the crowds began to pour into the canoes; some of them already were chanting the Taholan song of farewell. Fat Kopana sat in his litter, smiling, shining with sweat even by the moonlight, booming out his last greeting.

Sahi held on high the sacred spear, "in order that it may see you well and remember you, Imai Deapa!"

And at the water's edge, Lavia Laia reached up and laid the wreath, with its ten-stranded interweavings of flowers, on Falloner's head.

"Will you keep the flowers?" asked the girl.

"Keep them? Until they are withered," said Falloner.

"But keep the dust of them, then!" she pleaded.

"The dust?" said Falloner, stupidly.

"To please me," said the girl.

"Yes," said Falloner. "I shall."

Was it a lie he was telling her? To see the joy that bubbled up in her laughter was price enough for the telling of ten lies. She was so happy that she could not stand still; the wind seemed to lift and sway her.

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"Kiss her, and forget her," growled the deep voice of Campbell.

Falloner kissed her, but she paid no attention to that. Kissing was not a Taholan fashion, and she was dismayed to see the wreath of flowers slide awry on his head. With her hands she reached up to steady it.

Then he was in the canoe; and it seemed to him that the strokes of the paddles were pulling at and stretching to the breaking point a strange, cold thread of sorrow. But the distance to the shore widened constantly. Still he could see Lavia Laia dancing. Some of the big-handed warriors picked her up. His last glimpse of her was that picture, as he had seen her before, swaying in the uplifted hands of the Taholans as she made a dance with her waving arms.

Even the sight of her uplifted grew dim. They were drawing close to the Wanderer. The canoes closed in more and more thickly, and the mournful, rolling notes of the farewell chant deepened in the air. Only the oldest of the men knew, rather dimly, the meaning of the words:

"Wherever you walk, your shadow is pointing to me.
When it lies behind you, the sun burns your eyes.
Turn again, and let the shadow guide you.
Turn again, it is the way your soul chooses.
The blue bay is waiting.
Under the palm trees the shadow falls cool as rain.
Kava awaits you there, my lord; kava, kava awaits you."

Darkness slid over Falloner. The canoe had slipped in under the side of the ship. He stood up. The smell of the tarred wood was sharp. The wind rattled the canvas with a lonely sound. He began to climb up the side, holding the wreath of Lavia Laia's flowers in one hand. When he reached the deck he still kept it in a strong grip.

THE END

Tricks of Boilers

STEAM boilers are said have caused more unexpected explosions than gunpowder or dynamite. Many a boiler, apparently in fine shape, steam pressure normal, water high, fire clean, has been left by the fireman for a few minutes only to blow up and wreck the building. Examination of the remains has not shown any defect that might have caused such explosion.

Factory firemen and engineers are superstitious men. If anything peculiar develops in a boiler or steam engine, or any minor accident occurs, they are likely to decide the apparatus has a jinx and look for other jobs.

—*Melville C. Whitman.*

Toad Poison

TOADS cause no warts. The liquid which oozes from their skin when they are handled will make the mouth or eyes smart. Milky drops which exude when the toad is scared will act as poison if swallowed; but will not make warts.

—*J. W. Holden.*

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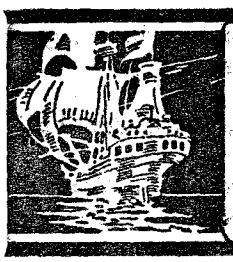

Argonotes.

The Readers' Viewpoint

ARGOSY of greater value than a pair of pants—or a monkey—according to this Netherlander,

JAN H. LUWEMA

That my previous letter interested you to such an extent that you ask me to let you have the tale of my first encounter with ARGOSY makes me feel that you have paid me a courteous compliment. Therefore, I'm quite willing to spill the beans. Here is my yarn:

Although originally a bookkeeper-correspondent by profession, the ordinary routine of jobbing away as such lacked all fascination for me, so that on various occasions I tried to get something more interesting, that being easier in 1924 than it would be at present. The period of 1925-1932 saw me employed as a general storekeeper and trader in the Belgian Congo. There it happened that one night out in Matadi I fell upon a countryman who served as an AB on board the American steamer Half Moon of the Bull Line. To him, in exchange for a pair of real American sailor pants, I traded a monkey; moreover, to seal the bargain properly, I also extracted out of this deal a couple of old ARGOSYS, from which volumes, rent and grease-marked as they were, I derived such pleasure that they came to be of almost greater value to me than that beautiful pair of pants. Afterward all the Bull liners that touched Matadi port were welcome fish to my nets. And whenever I could manage it, I combed them for more ARGOSYS.

In 1932 the general depression took my job away from me and forced me back to my original *lares et penates* here in the Hague, where, after having rid myself of my African savings rather too quickly, I joined the Legion (not the Foreign Legion, of course, but one even more formidable, *viz.*, that of the unemployed). Hunting for a job once took me over our market square where, our bi-weekly market being in full swing, I got the surprise of my life seeing a second-hand book dealer with a barrowload of old ARGOSYS. Although my funds were running very low at that period, I could not stand the temptation to invest some coppers in a couple of copies of which the contents looked most inviting. I feel it as a lasting shame that I am still in ignorance as to how the two serials, "The Bearded Slayer" and "Captain Judas," which happened to be running in the two copies I secured on that occasion, ended.

By the way, is there not some kind-hearted ARGOSY fan who could satisfy my curiosity on that point? Just a dip into the files of his old ARGOSYS, a pennyworth of stamps, and all would be rosy with me! My everlasting gratitude, too, would go out to that benefactor of mankind. The numbers which I want must be April 11, 18, 25, May 2, 9, 1931.

VOTES FOR 1935 ARGOSY COVERS

DO you want an original black and white drawing, an illustration like those which appear on the inside pages of the magazine? Save ten *consecutive* coupons like the one attached, fill them in with the date (or description) of the ARGOSY cover which you have liked best, and mail the coupons to The EDITOR, ARGOSY Magazine, 280 Broadway, New York City. The artist will present you with a drawing. You may divide your votes among several covers, in any way you choose, or even cast all ten votes for a single cover. But the ten coupons must be *consecutive*.

COUPON

(1 vote—8-24-'35. This coupon not good after Nov. 9)

Date cover appeared.....

Or description, if you cannot remember the date.....

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Your name.....

Address.....

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Well, there is an end to everything, even sometimes to being jobless. Owing to the pliability of my tongue, which enables me if need be to chatter in some five European languages, in 1933 I secured a job with a big hotel concern in Scheveningen (our seaside resort) which still employs me during the summer season as a sort of information clerk for the purpose of advertising their hotels and giving tourists information. During the winter, by doing such jobs as canvassing, guiding foreigners and so on, I earn enough to help me wrestle through those months.

It was through my summer job that I struck up my third, and let us hope lasting, acquaintanceship with ARGOSY. My little information kiosk happens to be divided into two halves, of which the other half is occupied by a newspaper stand. I could not fail to notice my bright-covered old friend on sale there every Thursday, so that now, at least during the summer season, I can buy my copies regularly (in winter I simply borrow it). In exchange for that courtesy, the girls who are in charge of the newspaper stand may use my information booth as a sort of cloak room during winter months.

That, Mr. Editor, is how I found, lost and twice refound the ARGOSY magazine.

After all you were not far from the truth when you suggested that I must be engaged upon some foreign export pursuit.

As to the forelast paragraph in your June 7th lines I cannot very well close this tale without adding that I do not mind in the least your publishing my first letter in the "Argonotes" of the July 20th issue; on the contrary, the fact that my first letter to you met with such a hearty reception and was found worth even the printer's trouble is both pleasing and flattering to me.

My best compliments and greetings to you, to the magazine, and to its contributors.

Information Kiosk Exp. Mpy. Scheveningen
Kiosk BUITENHOF
The Hague-Netherland

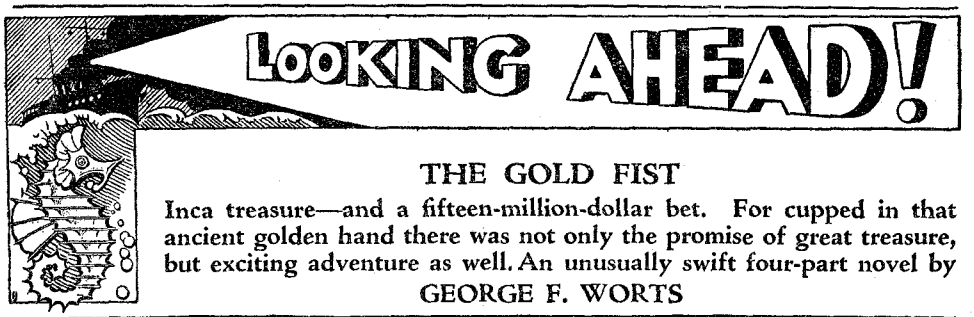
A BIG dime's worth, in the opinion of

MRS. MINNIE WEISER

It is my opinion that the best story printed so far this year in the ARGOSY is "The Spirit of the Thing," by W. C. Tuttle. I got more pure, unadulterated enjoyment out of reading this story than any I have read for ages. W. C. Tuttle has rolled more action, excitement and fun in this short story than some authors could in a seven-part serial. Let us have some more like it.

My husband and I have been getting the ARGOSY ever since we were married (about 16 yrs). Our fourteen-year-old son is as ardent a fan now as we are. We pass all our copies on to my mother and my brother, and then they are taken to the country to my other brother. The neighbors borrow them, and I firmly believe that the dime invested in the magazine gives more real pleasure than anything I know of.

Dayton, O.



THE GOLD FIST

Inca treasure—and a fifteen-million-dollar bet. For cupped in that ancient golden hand there was not only the promise of great treasure, but exciting adventure as well. An unusually swift four-part novel by

GEORGE F. WORTS

THE RICHEST WIDOW

Another *Madame Storey* tale. The world's most famous woman detective was determined that she would not be beaten—not even by the sea. Yet often the sea hides secrets that are past finding out. A thrilling novelette by

HULBERT FOOTNER

THE EYES HAD *IT*

The story of a cockeyed cat that ran amuck on the good ship Lebanon, sailing the Mediterranean. A short story filled with laughs by

THEODORE FREDENBURGH

COMING TO YOU IN NEXT WEEK'S ARGOSY—AUGUST 31

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SAVE ON TIRES *New Low Prices!*

ATLAS SAVED US 50% ON OUR TIRES
AND THEY ARE GUARANTEED FOR A WHOLE YEAR!
12 MONTH WRITTEN GUARANTY BOND... WITH EACH TIRE
DEALERS WANTED

GOODYEAR Firestone Goodrich U.S. AND OTHERS

$2.15 29x4.40-21

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ATLAS SUPER VALUES

This old reliable company is first choice with thousands of motorists who demand highest quality at lowest cost. Actual tests on rough-test roads prove that standard brand tires reconstructed by the scientific Atlas process deliver 50 to 60% more service. **Order today, save money.**

50% to 60% MORE SERVICE

BALLOON TIRES Size Rim	Tires	Tubes
29x4.40-21	$2.15	$0.85
29x4.50-20	2.35	0.85
30x4.50-21	2.40	0.85
28x4.75-19	2.45	0.95
29x4.75-20	2.50	0.95
29x5.00-19	2.85	1.05
30x5.00-20	2.85	1.05
28x5.25-18	2.90	1.15
29x5.25-19	2.95	1.15
30x5.25-20	2.95	1.15
31x5.25-21	3.25	1.15
28x5.50-18	3.35	1.15
29x5.50-19	3.35	1.15
30x6.00-18	3.40	1.15
31x6.00-19	3.40	1.15
32x6.00-20	3.45	1.25
33x6.00-21	3.65	1.25
32x6.50-20	3.75	1.35

TRUCK BALLOONS Size	Tires	Tubes
6.00-20	$3.75	$1.65
6.50-20	4.45	1.95
7.00-20	5.95	2.95
7.50-20	6.95	3.75
8.25-20	8.95	4.95
9.00-20	10.95	5.65
9.75-20	13.95	6.45

TRUCK TIRES Size	Tires	Tubes
30x5	$4.25	$1.95
33x6	3.75	1.45
32x6	7.95	2.75
36x6	9.95	3.95
34x7	10.95	3.95
38x7	10.95	3.95
36x8	12.45	4.25
40x8	15.95	4.95

REG. CORD TIRES Size	Tires	Tubes
30x3	$2.25	$0.65
30x3½	2.35	0.75
31x4	2.95	0.85
32x4	2.95	0.85
33x4	2.95	0.85
32x4½	3.35	1.15
33x4½	3.45	1.15
34x4½	3.45	1.15
30x5	3.65	1.35
33x5	3.75	1.45

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Any Initial, Many other special values.

Earn money taking orders among your friends and others for our beautiful new line of Playing Cards, *including the new Initial Card.* Unique, smart styles; popular low prices! Liberal commission. Make your spare time pay big.

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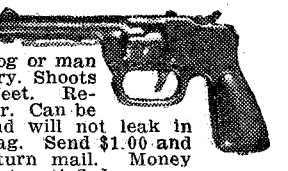
DR. W. D. SMITH INVENTOR

An enlarged, inflamed or faulty Prostate Gland very often causes Lameback, Frequent Night Rising, Leg Pains, Pelvic Pains, Lost Vigor, Insomnia, etc. Many physicians *endorse massage as a safe effective treatment.* (See Reference Book of the Medical Sciences, Vol. VII, 3rd edition.) Use "PROSAGER," a new invention which enables any man to massage his Prostate Gland in the privacy of his home. It often brings relief with the first treatment and must help or it costs you nothing. No Drugs or Electricity.

FREE BOOKLET

EXPLAINS TRIAL OFFER. ADDRESS MIDWEST PRODUCTS CO., B-1400, KALAMAZOO, MICH.

PROTECT YOURSELF
without carrying firearms



This six-shot liquid pistol when loaded with ammonia will stop the most vicious dog or man without permanent injury. Shoots accurately at twenty feet. Resembles a police revolver. Can be carried conveniently and will not leak in pocket of car or handbag. Send $1.00 and receive the gun by return mail. Money promptly refunded if not satisfied.

PERSONAL DEFENSE CO.
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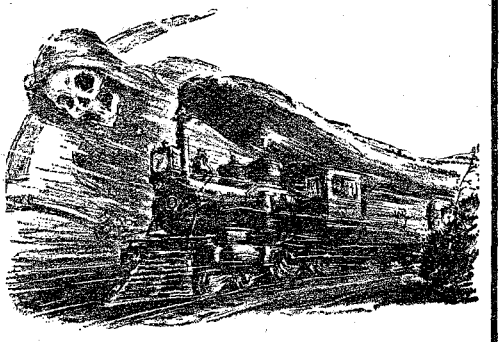

After Men Were on Duty Seventy Hours, They Got "Kinda Sleepy." That Was Why They Fought for the Hog Law. Read the Thrilling Story of Their Struggles in

HOG LAW
A Short Novel
By **E. S. DELLINGER**

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STOP THAT ITCHING AND SCRATCHING

According to the Government Health Bulletin No. E-28 at least 50% of the adult population of the United States are being attacked by the disease known as Athlete's Foot.

There are many other names given to this disease, but you can easily tell if you have it.

Usually the disease starts between the toes. Little watery blisters form and the skin cracks and peels. After a while the itching becomes intense and you feel as though you would like to scratch off all the skin.

FOOT-ITCH
(ATHLETE'S FOOT)

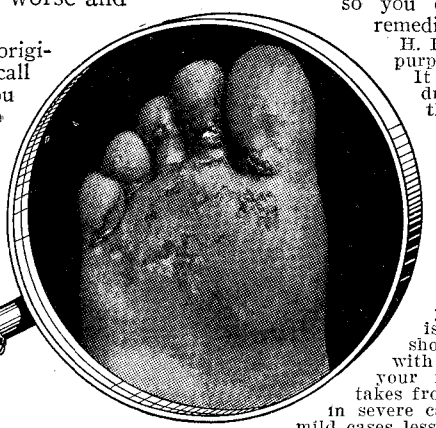
Send Coupon-Don't Pay till Relieved

Beware of It Spreading

Often the disease travels all over the bottom of the feet. The soles of your feet become red and swollen. The skin also cracks and peels, and the itching becomes worse and worse.

It has been said that this disease originated in the trenches, so some people call it Trench Foot. Whatever name you give it, however, the thing to do is to get rid of it as quickly as possible, because it is very contagious and it may go to your hands or even to the under arm or crotch of the legs.

Most people who have Athlete's Foot have tried all kinds of remedies to cure it without success. Ordinary germicides, antiseptics, salves or ointments seldom do any good.



Here's How to Treat It

The germ that causes the disease is known as Tinea Trichophyton. It buries itself deep in the tissues of the skin and is very hard to kill. A test made shows that it takes 20 minutes of boiling to kill the germ, so you can see why the ordinary remedies are unsuccessful.

H. F. was developed solely for the purpose of treating Athlete's Foot. It is a liquid that penetrates and dries quickly. You just paint the affected parts. It peels off the infected skin and works its way deep into the tissue of the skin where the germ breeds.

Itching Stops Immediately

As soon as you apply H. F. you will find that the itching is immediately relieved. You should paint the infected parts with H. F. night and morning until your feet are well. Usually this takes from three to ten days, although in severe cases it may take longer or in mild cases less time.

H. F. will leave the skin soft and smooth. You will marvel at the quick way it brings you relief; especially if you are one of those who have tried for years to get rid of Athlete's Foot without success.

H. F. Sent on FREE TRIAL

Sign and mail the coupon and a bottle of H. F. will be mailed you immediately. Don't send any money and don't pay the postman any money, don't pay anything any time unless H. F. is helping you. If it does help you we know that you will be glad to send us $1.00 for the treatment at the end of ten days. That's how much faith we have in H. F. Read, sign and mail the coupon today.

Mail this Coupon

GORE PRODUCTS, INC.,
860 Perdido St., New Orleans, La.

Please send me immediately a complete treatment for foot trouble as described above. I agree to use it according to directions. If at the end of 10 days my feet are getting better I will send you $1.00. If I am not entirely satisfied I will return the unused portion of the bottle to you within 15 days from the time I receive it.

NAME .....

ADDRESS .....

CITY ..... STATE .....

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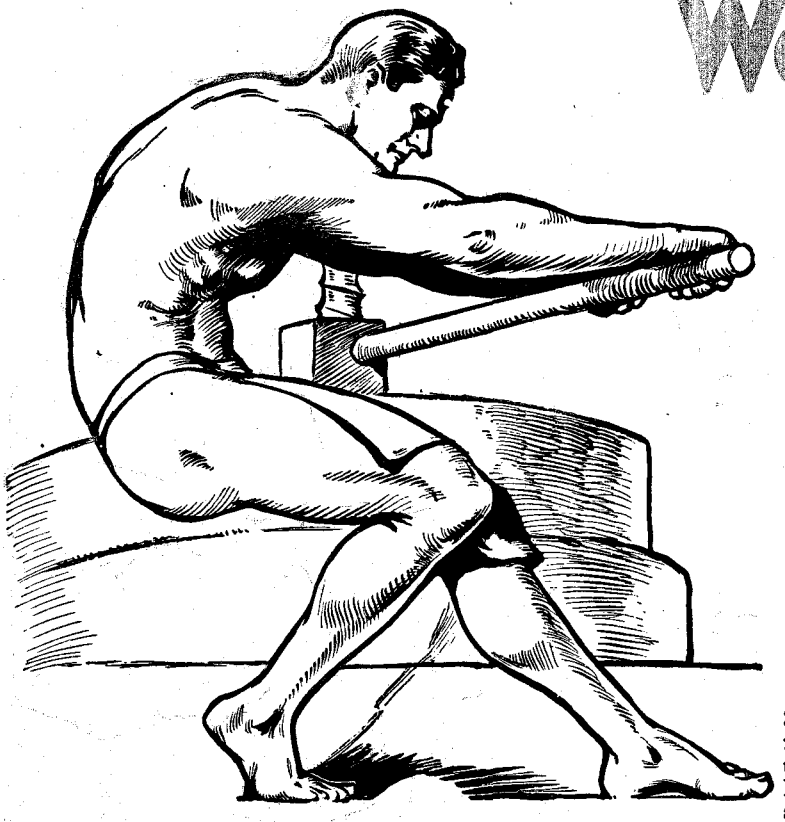
STOP YOUR Rupture Worries!



Learn About My Perfected Unique Rupture Invention!

Why worry and suffer with that rupture any longer? *Learn now about my perfected rupture invention.* It has brought ease, comfort, and happiness to thousands by assisting Nature in relieving and curing many cases of reducible hernia! *You can imagine how happy* these thousands of rupture sufferers were when they wrote me to report relief, comfort and cures! How would YOU like to be able to *feel* that *same* happiness to sit down and write me such a message—a few months *from today?* Hurry—send coupon quick for Free Rupture Book, PROOF of results and invention revelation!

Marvelous-Acting Device Binds and Draws the Broken Parts Together as You Would a Broken Limb!

Surprisingly—continually—my perfected *Automatic* Air Cushions draw the broken parts together allowing Nature, the Great Healer, to swing into action! All the while you should experience the most *heavenly* comfort and security. *Look!* No obnoxious springs or pads or metal girdles! *No* salves or plasters! My *complete* Appliance is feather-lite, durable, invisible, sanitary and *CHEAP IN PRICE!* Wouldn't YOU like to say "goodbye" to rupture worries and "hello" to NEW freedom . . . NEW glory in living . . . NEW happiness—with the help of Mother Nature and my *marvelous-acting* Air Cushion Appliance?

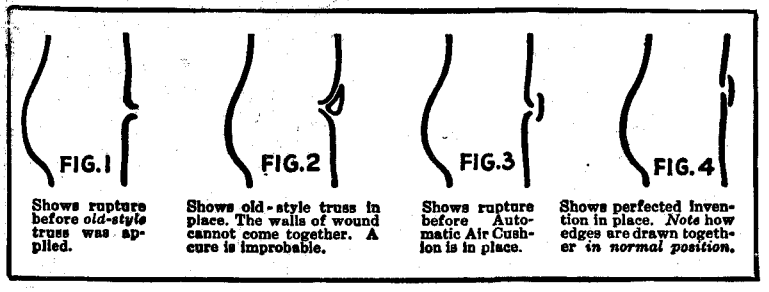


FIG. 1
Shows rupture before *old-style* truss was applied.
FIG. 2
Shows old-style truss in place. The walls of wound cannot come together. A cure is improbable.
FIG. 3
Shows rupture before Automatic Air Cushion is in place.
FIG. 4
Shows perfected invention in place. *Note* how edges are drawn together *in normal position.*

PROOF!

Reports on Reducible Rupture Cases

"LIFTS 400 LBS.!"

"Have no further use for your Appliance as I'm O. K. Wore it a year. I now can lift 400 lbs., without any fear." — John L. Heiges, 635 West Locust St., York, Pa.

"CAN RUN UP HILL"

"I had a rupture about 14 years, then wore your Appliance for 3. It is about a year since I threw it away. I feel fine, gaining weight nicely. I can run up and down hill which I never could before."—Mr. J. Soederstrom, 2909 Trowbridge Ave., Cleveland, Ohio.

Sent on Trial!

My invention is never sold in stores nor by agents. Beware of imitations! You can get it only from my U. S. factories or from my 33 foreign offices! *And I'll send it to you on trial.* If you don't like it—if it doesn't "work"—it costs you NOTHING. But don't buy now. Get the facts about it FIRST! Write me today. I'll answer in plain, sealed envelope with amazing information *Free.* Stop Your Rupture Worries—send coupon now!

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Rush me your new Free Book, amazing rupture method revelation, Proof of results, *all without obligation,* and in plain, sealed envelope.

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